

## 9/24/2007 This Week in Congress

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September 24, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." The House met this week and passed legislation to expand federal mortgage protections to more Americans and renewed an insurance program that protects against terrorist attacks. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Introducing Legislation to Improve Care for Soldiers, Visiting Ft. Riley Hospital

This week, I introduced legislation to ensure that our country is providing the best care and benefits to our service members and veterans. I also visited Fort Riley's Irwin Army Community Hospital on Friday to learn about services provided to injured soldiers.

The bill I introduced implements the recommendations of the Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors. Following the discovery of poor conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, the President formed this Commission and gave former Kansas Senator Bob Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala the task of conducting a comprehensive review of troop and veteran care. Dole and Shalala were on Capitol Hill

on Wednesday to present the Commission's report to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Senator Dole's remarkable personal story of recovery from wounds he received in battle, as well as his lifetime of public service and experience, sent a powerful message to Congress that changes can and should be made. Our military members and veterans deserve a strong support system. Congress should now take a serious look at these proposed changes and move quickly to improve the care and treatment of our country's heroes and their families. [Click here to learn more about the legislation I sponsored.](#) You can also read my opening statement to the Veterans' Affairs Committee by [clicking here.](#)

On Friday, I visited Irwin Army Hospital at Fort Riley to discuss military health care issues with Colonel Dawn Smith, Commander of the Hospital. Specifically, Col. Smith briefed me about the hospital's Warrior Transition Unit. Warrior Transition Units were implemented after the incidents at Walter Reed. The transition units provide command and control, primary care and case management for service members receiving treatment for wounds and injuries. My thanks to Col. Smith for walking me through the unit. [Click here to see photos from my visit.](#)

Former KBI Director Welch Continues Fellowship in Washington, D.C.

Former Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI) Director Larry Welch continued his congressional fellowship in my office by traveling to our nation's capital this week. Director Welch and I met with the leaders of federal agencies and organizations that are working to combat drugs in our communities, especially methamphetamine. Director Welch and I had previously conducted meetings with local law enforcement across Kansas to discuss their efforts and challenges in fighting meth and other drugs. His visit to Washington, D.C., was a good opportunity to get educated about the federal government's role in the battle against drugs and to advocate for more help for law enforcement efforts in Kansas.

Director Welch has a wealth of knowledge about law enforcement that was helpful as we met with top officials to discuss

a number of important issues, including federal efforts to stop the international production of meth and its importation into our country, actions by states to better track the purchasing of pharmaceuticals and ingredients used to make meth, and media campaigns to stop teens from using drugs. I was made aware of the [TheAntiDrug.com](http://TheAntiDrug.com), a helpful Web site parents can use to get the tools they need to raise drug-free kids.

During Director Welch's visit this week, we met with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), the National Institute of Drug Abuse, and attended an event by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) highlighting the results of a national survey on meth use and attitudes. [Click here](#) to see a photo from Director Welch's time in Washington, D.C.

#### Learning about the Proposed Expansion of Sunflower Electric's Holcomb Plant

On Friday, I met with Earl Watkins, President and CEO, and Steve Miller, Senior Manager of External Affairs, at Sunflower Electric in Hays. They shared with me the current process for obtaining the appropriate permit from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) for the expansion of the energy facility at Holcomb and creation of a Bioenergy Center, which would consist of an ethanol plant, a biodiesel plant, a dairy, a digester, an algae reactor and the coal power plant. All six of these components work together to produce energy, reduce pollution and increase efficiency.

It is great to see this company eager to do the right things - reduce emissions and increase efficiencies with the least amount of waste possible. The goal of the project is to add the additional coal-fired generator without increasing the overall levels of carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide emitted from the power plant will be used within the operation of the Bioenergy Center. The proposed new expansion at Holcomb would be the first of its kind in this country and serve as a model for other facilities. Sunflower should be supported in their work to make this plant environmentally friendly. It would be a shame if their permit from KDHE was denied despite all of these efforts.

This project would create thousands of jobs throughout the construction process and generate billions of dollars for the Kansas economy. The expansion of the Holcomb Plant would also provide expanded infrastructure that conceivably will provide more opportunities for wind energy facilities in Kansas. Our state is positioned to be a leader in energy production and the Holcomb expansion is the right step toward taking that lead.

#### Giving Thanks to Kansas Soldiers during Fort Riley Welcome Home Ceremony

On Thursday night, I attended a Welcome Home Ceremony at Fort Riley for approximately 165 Soldiers of 1st Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division. These soldiers returned from a one year tour in Iraq where they conducted security and convoy escort operations. I appreciated the opportunity to speak to these brave men and women shortly before they were reunited with family members.

#### Supporting Passage of Legislation to Keep Air Travelers Safe

More Americans are traveling by air than ever before. In fact, the volume of air traffic in the United States is expected to double by 2020. We need an air traffic control system that can handle the increase in passengers.

On Thursday, I supported passage of legislation in the House to modernize the air traffic control system and fund the Federal Aviation Administration through 2011. This bill makes a needed investment in our nation's airways to ensure the air traffic control system has qualified personnel and the most up-to-date equipment to handle the increasing number of flights.

I worked to successfully defeat a proposal that would have increased general aviation user fees. Many of the general aviation aircraft and parts are made in Wichita and this user fee proposal would have greatly harmed the local and state economy, as well as individual pilots across the state.

### No Child Left Behind: Does it Receive a Passing Grade?

Congress is currently working on legislation that would renew the federal education law known as No Child Left Behind, which requires more testing due to higher accountability requirements. This week, I added a new feature to my Web site that allows Kansans to register their opinion on this law. I encourage you to visit my Web site and "grade" No Child Left Behind.

### Welcoming New Citizens

I spoke to a group of 100 new citizens on Monday at the Dole Institute in Lawrence. Immigrants from 30 different countries became citizens this week in a naturalization ceremony presided over by the Honorable John Lungstrum, chief judge of the federal district court in Kansas. The ceremony was held on Constitution Day, which this year marked the 220th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution.

I spoke to the new Americans about the responsibilities of citizenship and the importance of sharing their stories with

others. [Click here to read the speech.](#) Special thanks to University of Kansas Chancellor Robert Hemenway and congratulations to the new citizens.

#### Providing an Update on Agricultural Legislation to Kansas Attorneys

On Friday, I spoke at a Kansas Bar Association event hosted by Kansas Farm Bureau to talk with Kansas attorneys about agriculture law, including the farm bill and energy issues. The Kansas Farm Bureau and Kansas Bar Association are working together to create an Agricultural and Rural Law Section of the Bar Association. The goal is to assist rural Kansas attorneys with issues they can use in their practices that help farmers and ranchers across the state. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with the group about issues important to Kansans. Thank you to Mike Irvin of Kansas Farm Bureau for organizing the event.

#### U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns Announces Resignation

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns announced his resignation this week after nearly three years of service in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. I appreciate the close working relationship I have had with Secretary Johanns. The Secretary was very active and engaged in the farm bill debate and spent time traveling across the country to meet with farmers and ranchers, including a visit to Kansas two years ago. I anticipate a smooth transition and know that USDA and American agriculture will remain in good hands.

#### Discussing State Children's Health Insurance Program with HHS Secretary

I visited with the Secretary of Health and Human Services on Thursday about legislation to fund the State Children's Health Insurance Program. The bill is expected to be considered in the House this week.

"Kansas Agriculture and the Farm Bill" to Appear on Smoky Hill Public Television

I recently joined experts in Kansas agriculture to serve as a panelist for a Smoky Hills Public Television program entitled, "Kansas Agriculture and the Farm Bill." Also featured on the program are Steve Baccus, president of Kansas Farm Bureau; John Thaemert, president of the National Association of Wheat Growers; Ken McCauley, president of the National Corn Growers Association; and Dr. Barry Flinchbaugh, professor of agricultural economics at Kansas State University. Thanks to Kyle Bauer of KFRM/KCLY radio for moderating the discussion.

The program will air Tuesday, September 25 at 9:00 p.m. and Monday, October 1 at 9:00 p.m. Consult your local cable company or local program guide to determine the public television channel in your area.

Possible Refund for Expedited Passport Fees Available

The U.S. Department of State has announced that expedite fees for passport applications may be refunded to certain applicants. In order to determine eligibility, Kansans will need to contact the State Department by mail or e-mail. For more information, please [click here](#). As always, if you have questions about this process or need assistance applying for a passport, please contact one of my three Kansas offices.

## Participating in Hays Community Events

Hays High School Homecoming: I enjoyed attending Hays High School's homecoming parade and football game on Friday against the Garden City High School Buffaloes. Congratulations to Justin Shank and Kayla Dreiling on being selected as homecoming queen and king.

Historic Fort Hays Days: This week celebrated the 25th annual Historic Fort Hays Days at the fort in Hays. On Saturday, I helped with our local Lions Club pancake and sausage feed. The money raised goes to the activities at Old Fort Hays.

## Celebrating the Marriage of Travis Murphy and Mandy Mead

I attended the wedding of Travis Murphy and Mandy Mead on Saturday in Abilene. Travis has been a part of my staff for many years and currently serves as the district director in my Salina office. I enjoyed the opportunity to share this special moment with Travis and Mandy and wish them all the best.

In representing MidAmerica Nazarene University were President Edwin Robinson and Vice President for Institutional Advancement Dwight Douglas of Olathe. They were in to give me an update on university programs and discuss the importance of increasing Pell grants and decreasing student loan interest rates for students. Gina Marx of Valley Center, Sherry Reed of Topeka and Judy Weltu of Paola were in with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development to share ideas about how to improve No Child Left Behind and student performance in Kansas.

Colonel Roger Wilson, the new commander for the Kansas City Army Corps of Engineers, was in along with fellow Corps members Steve Iverson, Larry Myers and David Combs of Kansas City to discuss ongoing projects. Mary Lou Warren, Director of the Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of Great Bend, was in to talk about the negative impact of requiring RSVP programs to compete for renewal funds and securing resources for Meals on Wheels reimbursements.

Kyle Smith of Topeka was in with the Kansas Bureau of Investigation to visit with Director Welch and me during a meeting with the National Alliance for Model State Drug Laws. Donn Teske of Wheaton, Don Rezuc of Emmett, Girard Steinlaee of Corning and Roger Schneider of Salina were in with Kansas Farmers Union to discuss agriculture issues and grant programs. Paul Fleener of Manhattan was in with the Society of St. Andrew to share the good work this organization does to help feed the hungry by connecting them with farmers.

Mark Callender of Dighton, Gale Longnecker of Concordia and Ray Bartholomew of Hutchinson were in with the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers to discuss the 2007 Farm Bill and how its provisions will affect farmers whose land they manage. Chris Black and Earl Carter of Wichita were in with the Society of Professional Engineering Employees in Aerospace to talk about the need to protect the medical benefits of retirees. Representatives of Sterling College were in to discuss new projects and programs at the university, including distance learning initiatives. In with the group were Vice President Mark Saver and Vice President for Innovation and Technology Ken Brown of Sterling.

Several Kansans stopped by for a tour of the United States Capitol building this week. Vernon, Mary, Luke and Ben Weber of Herington stopped by, as did Bob and Joyce Diehl of Solomon. Also in were Glorianne Milne of St. Francis and Leanna Johnson of El Dorado.

Very truly yours,

Jerry