

10/01/2007 This Week in Congress

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October 1, 2007

Dear Friend,

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

Working to Secure Funding for the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery

This week, I spoke to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs Bill Tuerk about the importance of moving quickly to fund the proposed Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery. I am pleased to learn that the federal funding for constructing the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery is the VA's top priority for fiscal year 2008, which begins today. I am confident that a solution can be worked out soon to ensure that cemetery construction is not delayed and can begin this fall as planned, despite the federal government currently operating under a short-term budget.

I had previously met with VA Secretary Jim Nicholson and Under Secretary Tuerk to discuss this cemetery, which will be built on grounds donated by Fort Riley. Now that Fort Riley's post cemetery has reached capacity, it is more important than ever for this state veterans cemetery to move forward swiftly to provide honorable burial space for Kansas veterans.

Congressional Members Come Together to Fight for Community Pharmacies

Community pharmacists provide prescription care in rural and inner-city communities at 23,000 independent retail pharmacies nationwide. It is a place where people can go to receive personal service and receive medications from pharmacists they know and trust. This week, I joined three fellow Congressional members - Marion Berry of Arkansas, Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington and Anthony Weiner of New York - in announcing the creation of a coalition to advocate for community pharmacy issues and the important role they play in the delivery of health care.

The Congressional Community Pharmacy Coalition is a good example of bringing members together from all parts of the country to champion issues that affect both rural and urban communities. We will work to ensure that the doors of local pharmacies stay open and health care needs are met.

Controversy over Children Health Care Issue

Despite objections from the President, the House approved legislation this week to renew the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). I have received calls and letters about SCHIP and while most are supportive of the program, others have specific objections. Perhaps the most common complaint is that the bill would provide health care for illegal immigrants. This is not true. The legislation specifically prohibits illegal immigrants from receiving health care paid for by taxpayers.

Since 1997, SCHIP has helped states meet the basic health care needs of children from lower-income families. It limits eligibility to families that have incomes 200 percent above the federal poverty level. Once children turn 18, they are no longer eligible for benefits. The legislation, which is supported by physicians, hospitals and pharmacists, continues SCHIP for at least five more years.

By providing health insurance to these youngsters, we help lower health care costs for other Americans. In the absence of health insurance, individuals typically receive care by visiting the emergency room. This is the most expensive way health care is administered. Hospitals are forced to provide this care for free and then recoup their costs by charging patients with health insurance more. By opening the door to doctor's offices, we eliminate these costly emergency room visits.

Name of Kansas Murder Victim Displayed on Wall in Washington, D.C.

Tuesday marked the National Day of Remembrance for murder victims. Dianne Meyers of Ellis was in Washington, D.C., to participate in the unveiling of a wall that includes the name her daughter, Lindsay Nicole Meyers, who was murdered on October 8, 2004. The National Murder Victims Wall was constructed to honor victims and includes the names of thousands of victims from across the country. Dianne is a classmate of mine from Plainville High School and has been an advocate for domestic violence issues since her daughter's death. I thank Dianne for her efforts to bring awareness to the dangers of domestic violence. My thoughts continue to be with the Meyers' family on the tragic loss of Lindsay.

Transportation Committee Studies Rail Service

From hauling grain to the marketplace to transporting chemicals to factories, our country relies on rail freight service to help power our economy. Lately, there have been complaints by some shippers that the railroads have not been providing adequate service. On Tuesday, I participated in a hearing of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to discuss railroad service in our country. Demand of rail service has outgrown the capacity of our rail system and investment is needed to expand rail lines to improve service.

Agriculture Subcommittee Reviews Regulation of Commodity Futures Markets

The Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management, on which I serve as Ranking Member, held a hearing this week on reauthorization of the Commodity Exchange Act. This legislation provides the basis for regulation of the commodity futures markets and gives the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) authority to oversee the commodity futures markets. Commodity markets have experienced record growth in the last several years. This has provided new ways for businesses to manage risk and has substantially benefited the U.S. economy. To keep up with these new and growing markets, it is important that Congress move forward with the reauthorization process.

Fort Hays State University Senior Companion Program Celebrates 33 Years

On Friday, I attended the Senior Companion Program annual recognition banquet and celebration in Hays. The program, sponsored by Fort Hays State University, pairs people age 60 and older with elderly persons who are homebound and oftentimes living alone. In addition to creating relationships and friendships, volunteers help with things such as household chores and providing transportation to appointments. The assistance with these everyday activities and tasks can mean the difference in the opportunity for an elderly person to live on his or her own.

The program is in its 33rd year of service and supports more than 150 volunteers in 13 counties in western Kansas today. I commend those who participate in the program for their devotion and community involvement, and I thank

program director Jolene Niernberger for her hard work and dedication. Entertainment for the banquet was provided by the Hays High Chamber singers under the direction of Elise Peterson and accompanied by my wife, Robba.

Attending the Great American Cattle Drive and Cowtown Festival in Ellsworth

On Saturday morning, I attended festivities and participated in the parade of the Great American Cattle Drive and Cowtown Festival in Ellsworth. The celebration followed a three day trail ride and featured 140 head of longhorns to commemorate the 140th anniversary of the founding of Ellsworth in 1867. This is one of our state's greatest celebrations and I enjoyed visiting with many area residents. Thanks to Darrell Choitz for driving me in the parade.

USDA Announces No Early Outs for Conservation Reserve Program Contracts

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced on Friday that it would not allow penalty-free releases from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), nor will it hold a general sign-up in the 2008 fiscal year. However, continuous CRP enrollments will continue. The announcement was made by Acting Secretary Chuck Conner. [Click here to read more from USDA.](#)

Remembering the Life of Martha Moore of Wichita

Last week, Martha "Marty" Moore, wife of former Kansas Lieutenant Governor John Moore, lost her battle with cancer. I have known Lt. Governor Moore for more than 20 years and consider him a great friend. Robba and I extend our deepest sympathies to Lt. Governor Moore and his children and extended family.

In the Office

Barth Crouch of Salina was in with Pheasants Forever to talk about the status of conservation programs in the House-passed version of the farm bill and how the programs are taking shape as the legislation progresses through the Senate. Sherwood Applegate of Wichita and Alan Hicker of Lawrence were in representing the National Association of Letter Carriers to express their support for legislation that would allow Americans to vote in federal elections by mail. Mark Farr of Nickerson, Verlean Brown of Wichita and Todd Roberts of Emporia are educators who were in to tell me what changes they would like to see made in the No Child Left Behind law.

Barbara McNeive of Topeka, Toni Gould of Parsons and Megan Nance of Pittsburg were in representing Kansas Health Occupations Students of America to tell me about the organization's efforts to promote careers in health care. Members of the Kansas Restaurant Association were in to voice their support for immigration reform, accelerated restaurant depreciation and food safety. In with the group were Scott Redler, Don Saylor, Bill Goodlatte, Michael Phipps and Fred Sabrino of Wichita; Bob Carmichael and Ron Seebeer of Topeka; Bob and Sabrina Symns of Hays; and Hugh O'Reilly Jr. of Gardner.

Joyce Banbury, a small business owner of Russell, was in to discuss legislation affecting internet sales taxes. Kurt Waldhaver and Jim Silver of McPherson were in representing American Maplan Corporation to talk about issues facing the plastics industry and the need to find domestic supplies of natural gas, which is a critical component of plastic production. President of the Kansas Air Force Association Sunny Siler of Wichita and National Director Emeritus Sam Gardner of Garden City were in to discuss the importance of supporting our U.S. Air Force.

Chuck Stones, Kathy Olsen and Becky Tongish of Topeka and Doug Wareham of Holton brought the 2007 Banking Leaders of Kansas class in to visit with me. This program is designed to improve the leadership skills of Kansas bankers and to increase the individual banker's understanding of the state and federal legislative process. I was pleased to meet members of the 2007 class, including Calvin J. Coady of Wichita, Amy Fauss of Overland Park, Eric Haar of Lawrence, Julie Hower of Council Grove, Ivan Huntoon Jr. of Baldwin City, Matthew Keller of Gardner, Darrel Miller of Hutchinson and Kathy Schwerdtfager of Lincoln.

Judy Lair of Piqua was in representing Greenbush Southeast Kansas Education Service Center to talk about changes needed in the No Child Left Behind law. Lance Russell of Hays was in with the Kansas Sunflower Commission to discuss the status of the 2007 Farm Bill. Tonia and Roger Carlson of Paxico, John Kirgam of Gardner and Neil Robertson of Merriam were in with the American Cancer Society to talk about initiatives that will help prevent and treat cancer.

Several Kansans stopped by my office this past week to tour the U.S. Capitol building, including Darrin and Tricia Lynch of Hays, Joseph Donlay of Wichita, Dianne Meyers of Ellis, Deb Becker of Plainville, Jacquelyn Scheuerman of Greensburg, Tim and Connie Chambers of Hutchinson, Patricia Berg of Collyer, Angie Moxley of Council Grove and Kelly Stirtz of Manhattan. Former Kansans Ron and Judy Sherard, now of Maryland, were also in, as were Larry and Sue Spear and Monsignor James Hake of Lincoln. In from Salina were Jessica Berry, Sherry Headlee, Betty Salzman and Betty Yockers.

Very truly yours,

Jerry