

10/29/2007 This Week in Congress

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October 29, 2007

Dear Friend,

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

Working to Improve Retirement Benefits for Guard and Reserve Members

The U.S. military has relied heavily on the service of Guard and Reserve members since September 11. Yet their benefits do not always match their increased service. This week, I insisted House leadership lower the retirement age for National Guard and Reserve members who have served at least 20 years. I led more than 75 of my colleagues in asking the House Armed Services Committee to include a Senate-approved provision in the 2008 Defense Authorization bill that is now being negotiated.

Unlike active duty forces that may receive retirement pay immediately upon completion of 20 years of service, Guard and Reserve members must wait until age 60. Many also lose the ability to contribute to civilian retirement plans while serving on active duty. The provision I support will reduce the age for receipt of retirement pay by three months for every 90 days a Guard or Reserve member spends on active duty after September 11, 2001, enabling members to retire as early as

age 50. This change is a good start to fixing the inequality and encouraging the recruitment and retention of National Guard and Reserve members. [Click here to read more about this issue.](#)

Senate Agriculture Committee Moves Forward on 2007 Farm Bill

The Senate Agriculture Committee finished work on its version of the 2007 Farm Bill this week. It is expected to be debated and voted on by the Senate during the first full week of November. If passed by the Senate, the legislation will move to negotiations between House and Senate agriculture leaders. A farm bill is long overdue. It is important that Congress move quickly to put into place federal agriculture policy as producers begin to make decisions for the next crop year.

Supporting Fort Riley as Site to Host an Additional Brigade

Members of the Kansas congressional delegation this week wrote General George Casey, Chief of Staff for the U.S. Army, in support of locating a new brigade at Fort Riley. The Army's "Grow the Force" initiative to increase the size of the Army will result in the creation of several new Infantry Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs) of about 3500 to 3800 soldiers each. Army posts across the country are now being evaluated and a placement decision is expected to be reached later this year. Fort Riley has a number of advantages that would make it a good host for these additional troops, including high-tech ranges, open training spaces and strong community support. [Click here to read the letter sent by the delegation.](#)

Agriculture Committee Discusses Disaster Assistance, Commodity Futures Markets

I participated in two hearings of the House Agriculture Committee this week. On Tuesday, the committee discussed the drought that is plaguing the Southeastern United States. Emphasis was placed on extending the current disaster bill, passed by Congress in April, to cover crops grown during the entire 2007 year. Currently, the program only covers losses to crops planted before February 28, 2007. While Kansas has not experienced drought like that of the Southeast this year, spring and summer storms have caused damage to fall crops in Kansas.

I also used the hearing as an opportunity to draw attention to problems with how the U.S. Department of Agriculture is administering the Livestock Compensation Program. Producers operating feedyards and conducting cattle operations in multiple counties have been denied access to the program. I stressed that this was not the intent of Congress and expressed my willingness to work with USDA to make the program available to those and other cattle producers.

Also this week, the Subcommittee on General Farm Commodities and Risk Management continued its discussion of the reauthorization of the Commodity Exchange Act, which regulates commodity futures markets.

Protecting Education Benefits for Kansas National Guard Soldiers

On Thursday, I participated in a meeting of the Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity where legislation I am co-sponsoring was approved. The bill, H.R. 513, would ensure that soldiers of the 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 34th Infantry, who recently returned from Iraq, receive the education benefits they earned during their mobilization. More than 100 members of the Kansas National Guard were deployed with this brigade and served more than 20 months on active duty. Unfortunately, due to differences in their deployment records, many soldiers returned home to find that they were ineligible to receive full Montgomery GI Bill education benefits, despite leaving and returning home on the same days as soldiers who are eligible. The legislation would correct this problem for these soldiers and for those who may be affected in the future to ensure that service members receive the benefits they deserve.

Location Announced for Hutchinson Veterans' Outpatient Clinic

Access to health care is one of the most important issues our veteran population faces in Kansas. To address this issue, I have worked with the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) to bring VA services to more Kansas communities. We moved one step closer to this goal in May when the VA approved an outpatient clinic in Hutchinson. This week, the VA confirmed a site location for the clinic at the southwest corner of 30th and Waldron streets in Hutchinson.

The new outpatient clinic will help ensure timely access to health care for our veterans who have earned it. The clinic is expected to open in the spring of 2008 and will provide routine health care, laboratory work, radiological views, prescription services and mental health services to area veterans. [Click here](#) to listen my audio on this topic and to read more about the Hutchinson clinic.

Visiting with Kansas High School Students

Natoma: While in Washington, D.C., I used video conference technology to visit with Adam Long's history class at Natoma High School on Wednesday. I talked to the students about my responsibilities as a Member of Congress and explained what a typical day is like in Congress. Although I prefer to visit with students in person, this technology allows me to visit with more Kansas students than my schedule would otherwise allow. It is also a good opportunity to showcase how advances in communication can link rural communities to other parts of the country. The students also visited with Mark Colwell of Hays, who is serving as an intern in my Washington, D.C., office.

Sabetha: During time in Nemaha County this week, I stopped at Sabetha High School to meet with the students in Leslie Scoby's government class. It is important that young people learning about our government have an opportunity to interact with their elected officials. I appreciated the chance to visit with the students about issues important to them. Following the classroom visit, I met with students Keith DeMint and Lauri Stoller and advisor Carol Spangler to learn about Grains For Hope, a non-profit organization started by students and teachers at Sabetha High School five years ago to fight hunger in the world. Students work with local businesses to locate, bag, label and ship fortified grains to Mozambique in Africa where it is delivered to people in need. Their next upcoming shipment will consist of 10,000 pounds. The organization has won state, national and international awards for its work. I applaud the students and teachers for their care and innovativeness. It is never too early to get involved and make a difference in the lives of others. To learn more about the organization, visit www.grainsforhope.org/.

Discussing Health Care with Stormont-Vail Board Members in Topeka

Before I traveled back to Washington, D.C., on Monday, I visited Stormont-Vail Regional Health Center in Topeka. Thank you to President and CEO Maynard Oliverius for the invitation. Stormont-Vail is the second oldest hospital in Kansas. The facility is now a 586-bed acute care referral center and provides services for hospitalized patients and outpatients in the northeast Kansas region. It was also a pleasure to meet with executive committee members Dr. Kent Palmberg, David Knocke, Carol Perry, Vernon Long, Janet Stanek, Bernard Becker, Carol Wheeler, David Cunningham, Debra Yocum, Marvin Fairbank and Thomas Luellen, all of Stormont-Vail. Others included Tom Bell, President and CEO of the Kansas Hospital Association; Greg Unruh, CEO of Community Health Services in Onaga; and Rita Burman, CEO of Sabetha Community Hospital in Sabetha.

Visiting Businesses in Seneca and Bern

Small businesses are the backbone of our communities. The products, services and employment they provide are essential to helping rural America flourish. On Friday, I visited the Seneca Chamber of Commerce to meet Executive Director Harry Leem, Chamber President Rick Carlson and City Administrator Glenn Rodden before visiting on Main Street. I enjoyed the discussion about activities going on in Seneca.

After spending time in Seneca, I stopped in Bern to visit local businesses and talk with community members. I met with residents at Bern Lumber, Bern Seed, AHRs Construction, Lortscher Agri Service, State Bank of Bern, Corner Market, Bern Post Office, Bern Oil Company and Bern-Sabetha Veterinary Clinic for discussions about several current issues.

As we work in Congress to create a regulatory environment and tax code that fosters small business growth, I welcome your ideas. Please feel free to share them with me through my Web site.

Congratulating the 2007 Leadership Kansas Graduates

I joined business leaders from across the state in Topeka on Friday evening at the 2007 Leadership Kansas Graduation Banquet. Sponsored by the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Kansas is a program designed to teach current and future leaders about the important issues facing Kansas business and government. I appreciated the opportunity to join Russell Jennings, Chair of the Leadership Kansas Board of Trustees, and Amy Blankenbiller, CEO of the Kansas Chamber of Commerce, in presenting graduation certificates to the 39 members of this year's class.

Congratulations to the following members of this year's graduating class: Pat Apple of Louisburg; Michael Armstrong of Fairway; James Behan of Garden City; Ivan Crossland Jr. of Columbus; Glennys Doane of Downs; Lynn Kreider of Colby; Vincent Masilionis and Kevin Yoder of Overland Park; Victor McMullen and Gary Regoli of Derby; James Minnix of Scott City; Heather Morgan of Hoyt; John Novak of Prairie Village; Lynette Olson of Pittsburg; Erin Pogue of Shawnee; Debra Prideaux of Hays; Patricia Rose of Hutchinson; Brenda Sykes McCants of Goodland; Jacob Wassenberg of Manhattan; State Representative Stephanie Sharp Bruyn, Hannes Zacharias and Sharon Zoellner of Lenexa; Celia Chin, Bradley Clothier, Laurette Lahey, Randall Peterson, Scott Schneider and Denise Sherman of Wichita; Jesse Borjon, Patti Bossert, Alan Conroy, Todd Johnson and David Sollars of Topeka; and David Corliss, Peggy Loyd, Michael Maddox, Roger Pine, Stanley Rasmussen and Michele Weigand of Lawrence.

In the Office

Kent Needham of Toganoxie, Frank Carson of Mulvane and Craig Meader of Burlington were in representing the Kansas Bankers Association to talk about banking issues in the farm bill and other legislation that would help banks in Kansas operate more efficiently. Bruce Ferguson of Junction City was in with Edenspace to discuss research funding for the development of cellulosic ethanol products.

Theresa Leiker and Dana Miller of Great Bend were in representing the American Society of Pension Professionals and Actuaries to talk about the benefit to workers of knowing what fees are associated with their 401(k) plan. Jeffrey Haaga of Abilene visited my office as part of the Congressional Youth Leadership Conference to learn more about what I do as a Member of Congress. Steve Stotts of Topeka was in representing the Kansas Department of Revenue to discuss legislation authorizing the collection of sales taxes by remote sellers.

Phillip Bradley and Tammy Davis of Lawrence were in with the Kansas Licensed Beverage Association to tell me about issues that affect the liquor and hospitality industry in Kansas. Greg Kressek of Colwich was in with ICM to talk about ethanol production in our state and ICM's proposal for cellulosic ethanol production. Dwane Timm and Scott Lohmeyer of Goodland came by to view the winners of the 2007 Congressional Art Competition in the U.S. Capitol building. CJ Mahoney of Russell also stopped by to visit. CJ is a former intern now working as a clerk for Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy.

A group of Lawrence residents were in to discuss several items that are important to the community, including the Lawrence public transit system, affordable housing and the Lawrence municipal airport. In representing the city were Lavern Squier, Joan Golden, Becca Booth, Mayor Sue Hack, Vice Mayor Mike Dever, City Manager Dave Corliss, LaVerne Epp and Dr. Bruce Passman.

Several Kansans came to my office for a tour the U.S. Capitol this week, including Terry Redetzke of Ellis, Johanna Bartels of Schoenchen, Sheryl Farney and Kathleen Miner of Kiowa, April Lawson of Derby, Annette Schaffer and Mona Chapman of Hays, Mary Rose Eakes of St. Marys, Rae Ann McCoy of Topeka, LaDona Schmidt and Ken and Karen Ebert of Salina and Susan Pingleton of Kansas City. Also in for a tour were Matthew Albright, Cody Harryman and Ron and Kathy Avey of Wichita; Kim and Mary Ann Altvater of Hutchinson; Lyle, Marilyn and Lily Staab of Overland Park; David Royer and Dr. Ron Barrett of Lawrence; Erik Runge of Emporia; Marissa Piltz of Olathe; Brandie Rhodes of Shawnee; Andy Wooten of Mission Hills; and Patrick, Sarah and Emily Russell of Ulysses.

Very truly yours,

Jerry