

11/26/2007 This Week in Congress

This Week in Congress

November 26, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I hope you and your family had a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday weekend.

Thanking Kansas Volunteers for Service in Disaster Areas

Kansans have seen the worst of Mother Nature this year. However, Kansans across the state have been generous in extending help to those in need from the tornado that destroyed Greensburg to the floods in southeast Kansas. In recognition of the giving spirit of Kansans, I have sponsored legislation to compensate volunteers for their efforts.

The Assistance for Individuals Delivering (AID) for America Act creates a federal tax credit for businesses that continue to pay employees while they volunteer in federal disaster zones. In Greensburg, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reports that more than 1,300 individuals have volunteered since May 4, the day of the deadly tornado. The work of these volunteers totals more than 26,000 hours. This legislation builds upon Kansans' spirit of giving by allowing more individuals to take time off of work to volunteer during times of disaster. [Click here to read more about this legislation.](#)

Discussing the Ongoing Crisis in Darfur

The Mid-Kansas Jewish Federation and Inter-Faith Ministries in Wichita hosted me this week for a discussion about the ongoing crisis in Darfur. The Jewish community has been outspoken in their opposition to the genocide taking place in the Darfur region of the African country of Sudan. I traveled to Sudan in April to meet with government officials and humanitarian leaders. As a witness to this present day genocide, we are obligated to create greater awareness and put pressure on the government leaders committing these atrocities. I appreciate the attention the Jewish community has given to this issue. Thanks to Moti Rieber, executive director of the Mid-Kansas Jewish Federation, for the invitation and to the folks at Inter-Faith Ministries for hosting the event. [Click here](#) to read more about my time in Darfur.

Visiting with Kansans during Conventions in Wichita

During my time in Wichita this week, I attended the annual conventions of the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts and the Kansas Association of Counties to visit with members about current issues. At the Association of Conservation Districts, I provided an update on the 2007 Farm Bill and other agriculture and conservation issues. Thanks to Executive Director Pat Lehman for the invitation to attend. At the Association of Counties, I talked about current issues being discussed in Congress, including transportation and energy. Thanks to Executive Director Randall Allen for the opportunity to be a part of the conference.

Celebrating the Expansion of Highway 54 from Liberal to the Oklahoma Border

On Monday, I joined Kansas Secretary of Transportation Deb Miller for the ribbon cutting of a new four-lane stretch of U.S. Highway 54 from Liberal to the Oklahoma state border. In 1997, I was able to secure federal funds for this heavily traveled stretch of Highway 54. Many of our highway expansion and improvement projects start in the east and move west. This time, the project is starting in the west and moving to the east.

While this is just the beginning of what I hope will eventually be a widening of a number of highways in Kansas to four lanes, the biggest benefit to those in Liberal is the additional safety that this new road brings. Earl Watt, editor of the Southwest Daily Times, talked to me about how many times the paper had been called out for fatal accidents on this stretch of road. I hope that this expansion will make the people of Liberal and all travelers on Highway 54 safer.

The patience and persistent efforts of local groups and citizens has paid off in making this project a reality. Much of the credit goes to the Southwest Passage Initiative for Regional and Interstate Transportation (SPIRIT). This organization consists of many active citizens, including Max Zimmerman and Jack Taylor, whose overall goal is the expansion of all of U.S. Highway 54 to four lanes from Wichita to El Paso, Texas.

Attending the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce's 120th Annual Dinner

On Tuesday evening, I attended the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce's 120th Annual Dinner. The program was entitled "Region on a Roll" and highlighted the Kansas City area, as well as the entire state. I have worked to make certain that Kansas City understands that success in our part of Kansas is something Kansas City should support. I appreciated the opportunity to join area residents for the event.

Inviting Kansas Veterans to Forum in Emporia

I will be hosting a veterans' forum in Emporia on Thursday to discuss health care and benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Dan Umlauf, Director for the Robert J. Dole VA Regional Office in Wichita, and Marie Weldon, Director for the VA Hospital in Topeka, will join me to hear the thoughts and concerns of veterans.

This is the tenth forum on veterans' issues I have hosted. All area veterans and members of the public are encouraged to attend. The event will be this Thursday from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. at American Legion Post 5, 2921 West 12th Avenue, in Emporia.

Listening Tour Continues

My Big First Listening Tour continued this week with a stop in Seward County to visit with residents in Liberal about several current issues. After my tour stop, I joined Nick Hatcher of Conestoga Ethanol for a tour of Arkalon Energy in Liberal. This is a 110 million gallon ethanol plant. I appreciated the tour and discussion about renewable energy with Nick.

This afternoon, I will be in Leoti in Wichita County and tomorrow I will be in Hugoton in Stevens County and Rolla in Morton County. [Click here to view times and locations and to stay up-to-date on other stops being scheduled.](#)

In the Office

In the office for a tour of the U.S. Capitol this week were Jeff and Kristen Houston of McPherson with their children, Sarah, Benjamin, Alex and Samuel. Also in were Mallory and Valerie Mahoney and Talbott Driscoll of Russell.

Very truly yours,

Jerry