

12/10/2007 This Week in Congress

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December 10, 2007

Dear Friend,

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

Working to Increase Access to Renewable Fuels

High gasoline prices continue to affect Kansans. Renewable fuels are a part of the solution and the future of this industry relies on our ability to increase opportunities for consumers to access the fuel. In an effort to increase access to renewable fuels, I joined other Members of Congress this week in asking the President to direct the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to begin testing higher blends of ethanol in gasoline. While there is an adequate supply of U.S.-produced ethanol, current EPA regulations prevent the use of ethanol in blends greater than 10 percent ethanol (E10) in most vehicles. With EPA approval, we can provide more blends of ethanol like E15, E20 or E30 for consumers.

Current ethanol production capacity in the United States is approximately 6.8 billion gallons per year. The availability of additional ethanol blends will move our country closer to energy independence, provide jobs and maintain an important market for our farmers. [Click here to read more about this issue.](#)

Agreement Allows Farm Bill Debate to Resume in the Senate

Farmers and ranchers are heading into the winter months with the usual uncertainties that come with this risky profession, but this year Kansas producers and their bankers have additional concerns about what farm programs will be in place next year as they await action in the Senate on the 2007 Farm Bill. Senators finally agreed this week to limit the amount of amendments that can be offered during debate of the farm bill and will hopefully soon pass a bill. Unfortunately, the delayed action means Congress will not send a farm bill to the President until next year. For this reason, it has become even more evident that a short-term extension of the current farm bill is necessary to avoid a lapse in farm policy. [Click here to read more about my efforts to extend the current farm bill.](#)

Announcing Water Conservation Program

Based upon an agreement with the State of Kansas, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced this week that it will be making 20,000 acres of irrigated and non-irrigated cropland in the Kansas Upper Arkansas River project area eligible for enrollment into the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). This will be the first acreage enrolled in CREP in the State of Kansas. The program in Kansas is focused specifically on utilizing CREP in areas where groundwater and surface water shortages are an issue.

CREP is a natural resources conservation program in which participants receive payments from USDA to remove cropland and marginal pastureland from agricultural production and convert the land to native grasses, trees and other vegetation. The Upper Arkansas River CREP project area includes all or parts of Barton, Edwards, Finney, Ford, Gray, Hamilton, Kearny, Pawnee, Stafford and Rice counties.

I believe this is an appropriate step in trying to sustain water for future generations. However, I continue to believe we must modify this program. In its current form, CREP pays agriculture producers to leave land idle and not irrigate in order to conserve water resources. Doing so keeps land capable of producing non-irrigated crops out of production. Earlier this year, I successfully added an amendment to the House-passed version of the 2007 Farm Bill to allow dryland crop production and grazing on CREP acres where the program is aimed at reducing water usage. My amendment allows dryland farming on these acres instead of simply idling them and allows agriculture producers to continue farming and supporting the agriculture businesses that are critical to the survival of rural communities.

A balance must be had that allows economic activity in the form of production agriculture to continue in an environmentally sensitive way while reducing the usage of water. I will continue working to modify farm bill provisions to allow dryland farming activities on CREP acres to better preserve economic activity in rural areas in Kansas.

Eligibility requirements for the Upper Arkansas River CREP will be announced by the Farm Service Agency, which administers the program. More information about this project can be found at:
http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/kscrep07.pdf.

House Considers Energy Legislation

I have long said the United States must move aggressively toward energy independence. Being energy independent will provide stability in our economy and enhance national security. To achieve this goal we must consider all domestically produced forms of energy. In addition, an energy policy must be crafted so that it does not further increase the cost of energy for American consumers.

The energy bill the House considered this week took several steps in the right direction toward energy independence. Importantly, the bill contained provisions to make cars more fuel efficient by increasing the corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standard that auto manufacturers must adhere to. If implemented, it would help reduce fuel usage in the U.S. The extension of the wind and solar energy tax credits contained in the bill are also needed and would continue incentives for both individual property owners and power generation companies.

While the bill does some good things, there were aspects that I was uncomfortable with that ultimately made me unable to support it. The legislation not only raised taxes, but I believe it will increase the cost of electricity. As a result, it will adversely impact middle and lower income Kansans currently struggling to keep pace with rising energy costs.

Negotiation of an energy bill will continue and I hope that a majority of Congress can find a solution that will increase all forms of domestic energy production and not further burden consumers.

Torsten Energy Announces Plans to Build Biodiesel Plant in Greensburg

On Monday, I was in Greensburg for an announcement that Torsten Energy LLC, which is based in Wright, plans to build a biodiesel plant in Kiowa County. Upon completion, Greensburg will be home to the second largest biodiesel production facility in Kansas. The plant is expected to create 20-25 jobs and produce 30-40 million gallons of biodiesel each year.

This development is great news for Kiowa County farmers and another step forward in the rebuilding of Greensburg. My thanks to Dennis McKinney, Kansas House Minority Leader; Patrick Stein, Vice President of Torsten Energy; John Janssen, Greensburg Mayor; and Don Richards, Kiowa County Commissioner, for helping make this announcement

possible.

The decision to build a biodiesel plant in Greensburg was not made because of some action taken in Washington, D.C. It was made because the citizens of Greensburg are committed to their community and its recovery. It also demonstrates that Kansans are willing to create a place to call home.

Learning about Republic County High School's Welding Program

After my tour stop in Belleville, I visited Republic County High School to meet with Principal Daryl Moore, Superintendent Troy Damman, Agriculture Education Welding Instructor Dan Stehlik and officials with Reinke Manufacturing, including Doug Wilkinson. Reinke Manufacturing produces irrigation systems and has provided welding equipment to establish a specialized program at Republic County High School to train students in advanced-level welding courses. This will prepare students for certification and employment upon graduation from high school if they so wish. There are plenty of businesses in the area, but not enough welders and skilled workers.

It is good to see the collaboration between private industry and school and community leaders to address the shortage of trained workers. I was able to watch three students work on welding projects while there. They are able to gain skills in the classroom that they can one day use to earn a paycheck. I appreciated the school and Reinke officials taking time to visit with me about this partnership. Thanks also to Paul Haase for helping coordinate my visit.

Touring MidAmerica Nazarene University

On my return to Washington, D.C., I visited MidAmerica Nazarene University in Olathe. Kansas students are fortunate to have such a beautiful and well-designed campus available to them. Dwight Douglas, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, was kind enough to show me several of the new facilities. I was impressed with the realistic hospital setting used for nursing education and appreciative of their efforts to develop nursing programs for underserved areas in western Kansas. I also toured the new Bell Cultural Events Center. Dr. Dennis Crocker explained the unique acoustical-engineering of the building, which makes it a great venue for students to perform and to bring in noteworthy performers from across the country.

Listening Tour Continues

My Big First Listening Tour continued this week with stops in Dodge City in Ford County, Waterville in Marshall County and Belleville in Republic County. [Click here](#) to see upcoming stops and to stay up-to-date on other stops being scheduled.

In the Office

Keith Yehle, Director of Government Relations at the University of Kansas, was in to explain provisions in the Higher Education Act and the effect it will have on colleges and universities in our state. Sunee Mickle of Topeka was in to introduce herself and explain her new role with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas. Mark Farr of Nickerson and Verlean Brown of Wichita were in with the Kansas National Education Association to discuss reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act.

Pat Morse of Dodge City was in to talk about Universal Service Fund reform. Representatives of Wesley Rehabilitation Hospital in Wichita were in to talk about Medicare patients accessing rehabilitation services. In with the group were CEO Pam Stanberry, Dr. Blake Veenis and Dr. Xavier NG.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C. office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building. Kendal Krug, Brandy Kirmer, Gail Brack and Chandra Pfeifer of Hays came by, as did LaNay Meier of Salina with her grandson, Jacob Conner of Hutchinson. Lindsay Henderson of Salina and David Owens of Wichita were also in for a tour.

Many Kansas legislators were in our nation's capital this week. Representative Forrest Knox and his wife, Paula, of Altoona; Representative Steve Brunk and his wife, Billie, of Bel Aire; Representative Gary Hayzlett of Lakin; Representative Richard Carlson and his wife, Cheryl, of St. Marys; Representative Ray Merrick and his wife, Phyllis, of Stilwell; Representative Elaine Bowers of Concordia; Representative Kevin Yoder of Overland Park; and Representative Ty Masterson of Andover all stopped by for a tour of the U.S. Capitol.

Very truly yours,

Jerry