

12/17/2007 This Week in Congress

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December 17, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." I am in Washington, D.C., for votes this week. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Winter Storms Hit Kansas, Federal Emergency Declared for State

Kansans once again find themselves in the center of disastrous weather. The state experienced extensive damage as a result of severe winter storms last week that produced rain, ice, sleet, snow and frigid temperatures. The recent storms have caused wide-scale power outages and damage to homes and businesses. Approximately 25,000 Kansans are currently without power. My thoughts are with those individuals and families still without power. Crews are working hard to restore power and my appreciation goes out to them for their efforts.

On Wednesday evening, the President declared an emergency for the State of Kansas. The declaration makes federal funds available to assist state and local units of government in all 105 Kansas counties implement emergency protective measures and assist with debris removal. The federal funds are important in helping communities recover from the winter

storm damage. [Click here](#) for more information about the available federal assistance. [Click here](#) to read more about the Kansas delegation's request to President Bush for federal disaster designation.

Guard and Reserve to Receive Improved Retirement and Education Benefits

This week, the House approved historic changes to modernize retirement and education benefits for National Guard and Reserve members as part of the annual policy and funding blueprint for the Department of Defense. Citizen soldiers from communities across Kansas are playing an increasingly critical role in our nation's defense, from Iraq and Afghanistan to our country's borders.

The 2008 National Defense Authorization Act reduces the age at which a member of the Guard and Reserve can draw retirement pay by three months for every 90 days of federal active duty service. This bill will enable members to retire as early as age 50. The bill also includes two important changes to G.I. Bill education benefits. One, it allows Guard and Reserve members to use their educational benefits for 10 years after separation from service. Two, it allows members of the Reserve component with three cumulative years of active duty service to qualify for education benefits at 80 percent of the active duty rate. Previously, two years of consecutive service was required to receive these benefits.

These enhanced benefits have been a long time coming and I am glad my colleagues in Congress are recognizing the contributions of our Reserve component, especially since September 11, 2001. This is a good start to addressing the inequalities and encouraging the recruitment and retention of National Guard and Reserve members. However, more work must be done to support our citizen soldiers. The greater requirements our nation has placed on the Guard and Reserve must be matched with greater commitment to them on our part. The 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, H.R. 1585, now awaits the President's signature to become law. [Click here](#) to read more about this legislation.

Senate Passes Farm Bill

On Friday, the Senate passed its version of the 2007 Farm Bill by a vote of 79-14. I am pleased the Senate was able to complete its work on this important legislation. Although this is a major step toward enacting a farm bill, much work and many challenges remain. Members from the House and Senate must now enter negotiations to resolve the differences between the two versions. Given the differences in the two bills, this is no small task. In addition to reaching an agreement, leaders must also produce a farm bill the President will accept and sign.

I believe this can be accomplished, but it will take time. In the meantime, Kansas farmers will continue to operate without a safety net. I continue to urge my colleagues to enact the one-year extension of the current farm bill I introduced while Congress attempts to complete a final version of 2007 legislation. This will provide farmers with more certainty as they begin to make planting and financial decisions for the next year. [Click here to read more about the legislation I introduced calling for the one-year extension.](#)

House Approves Continuing "Do Not Call" Registry

On Tuesday, the House passed two legislative measures to continue the "do not call" registry. The first permanently extends funding for the registry, making it free for the public. The second measure ensures that customers do not have to re-list their number in the database. The registry currently protects more than 145 million phone numbers from unsolicited marketing calls. I was happy to support this legislation and to shield Kansans from unwanted phone calls.

Sending a Holiday Message to Soldiers of the 388th Army Reserve Unit of Hays

This weekend, I visited the Ellis County Chapter of the American Red Cross. The Red Cross provides a service to families of armed service members called Veditalk. Veditalk allows families to send soldiers a video greeting. I used Veditalk to send a holiday greeting to the Army Reserve 388th unit out of Hays. I thanked the soldiers for their service. Families of our soldiers make a big sacrifice, especially at this time of year, with the absence of their loved ones. Thank you to Bill Ring, Chapter Manager, and Megan Augustine, Health and Safety Director, for sharing this opportunity with me.

Also this weekend in Hays, I visited the Fort Hays State University Foundation to meet with Brad Botz, Director of Gift Planning, to discuss legislation that promotes charitable giving to universities. I also enjoyed touring the Foundation building, which opened this fall thanks to the lead gift of Bill and Yvonne Robbins of Great Bend.

On Saturday, I met with Kansas oil and gas industry representatives Marty Patterson with Western Well Service of Hays, Terry Richardson with TR Service and Rental of Pratt, Tom Casey with Express Well Service and Supply of Victoria and Dennis Klima with Klima Well Service of Claflin to discuss regulations related to hours of service and transportation and taxation issues.

Thanking NRCS Director Harold Klaege for Service to Agriculture

After 37 years at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Harold Klaege, current director, will be retiring at the beginning of January. I commend Harold for his service and work to advance conservation in our state. NRCS announced this week that Astor Boozer, National Program Manager for the Conservation Reserve Program and Healthy Forest Reserve Program, will serve as Acting Director until a new director is hired. I would like to welcome Mr. Boozer to Kansas and look forward to working with him.

Listening Tour to Continue Next Week

My Big First Listening Tour will continue next week with stops in Cloud, Clay, Meade and Rooks Counties. They are scheduled as follows:

Thursday, December 27

Cloud County Tour Stop, Concordia

Time: 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Location: Lions Club, Cloud County Community College, 2221 Campus Dr.

Clay County Tour Stop, Clifton

Time: 1:45-2:45 p.m.

Location: First National Bank, Board Room, 103 E. Parallel St.

Friday, December 28

Meade County Tour Stop, Meade

Time: 10:45-11:45 a.m.

Location: Meade District Hospital, Rosson Room, 510 E. Carthage

Saturday, December 29

Rooks County Tour Stop, Damar

Time: 9:00-10:00 a.m.

Location: St. Joseph's Catholic Church, Parrish Hall, 107 N. Oak

[Click here to stay up-to-date on other stops being scheduled.](#)

In the Office

Carol Campbell of Winfield was in with American Farmers for the Advancement and Conservation of Technology to discuss modernization of technology in agriculture and its impact on the industry and consumers. Herington Mayor Julie Schlesener and City Manager Ron Strickland, along with Lt. Colonel Chuck Jarnot of Milford were in to talk about the three unmanned aerial vehicles the Kansas National Guard recently received and the air space agreement being sought with the Federal Aviation Administration to start training and testing at Herington. Kansas Vice Commander David Muro of Kansas City was in with the American GI Forum to discuss veterans mental health care legislation before Congress and the progress being made to improve care for Kansas veterans. I also visited with Eric Haar, Pat Doran and Laura Lutz of Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka while they were in Washington, D.C., this week.

Attorney Steven Graber of Manhattan was in to discuss how IRS treatment of certain retirement plans is affecting individuals and businesses in Kansas. Terry Holdren of Topeka and Edie Dahlsten of Lindsborg were in with Kansas Farm Bureau to share their thoughts on transportation legislation that would help farmers get their produce to market at a lower cost. Terry's wife, Natalie Holdren, was in to tour the U.S. Capitol Building.

Very truly yours,

Jerry