

## 1/22/2008 This Week in Congress

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January 22, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to this "This Week in Congress." The House reconvened this week and passed mine safety legislation and a bill to continue a program that helps replace dilapidated public housing units. There are many important issues for Congress to address this year. Please let me know what you think the top priority should be in 2008 by voting on my online poll. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Honoring the Life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

On Monday, I spoke at the Second Missionary Baptist Church in Hutchinson to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King served others his entire life with the determination to correct many of the wrongs in this country: injustice, inequality and ignorance. Instead of being first in material possessions, Dr. King challenged us to "be first in love, be first in moral excellence, be first in generosity." He said, "If you want to be important - wonderful. If you want to be recognized - wonderful. If you want to be great - wonderful. But recognize that he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. That's a new definition of greatness. It means that everybody can be great, because everybody can serve."

Joining me at the celebration were Kansas Senator Terry Bruce, Kansas Representatives Jan Pauls and Mark Treaster and Hutchinson Mayor Ron Sellers. I appreciated the opportunity to speak at this service and thank Dr. Hence Parson for the invitation.

## Commission Discusses Nation's Transportation and Infrastructure Needs

In 2005, Congress created a 12 member bipartisan commission to study the future of our nation's transportation needs and how to pay for those needs. On Thursday, I attended a hearing of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to listen to the recommendations of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission. These recommendations were designed to help start the discussion for the next highway authorization bill scheduled to be debated in 2009.

The overwhelming consensus of the commission was that the nation's highways and bridges have numerous needs that must be quickly addressed. The commission recommends total spending of at least \$225 billion a year for improvements and repairs on highway, transit and rail systems across the country. Currently, the United States spends \$100 billion on these types of projects. The commission also recommended consolidating 108 federal highway, transit and rail programs into 10 grant programs that will be based on performance and results.

Such an investment into our transportation infrastructure will mean finding ways to raise revenue to pay for these projects. Currently, the federal government receives 18.4 cents for every gallon of gas Americans purchase. Nine of the 12 Commissioners recommended increasing this gas tax by 25 to 40 cents a gallon over the next five years and to index it for inflation after that. This would be a 200 percent increase from what Kansans currently pay. As the Transportation Committee begins discussing the next highway bill, I work to meet our nation's transportation needs while being mindful of any increase in costs to Kansans. I encourage your input in the course of these discussions.

## Republican Agriculture Committee Members Discuss Status of the Farm Bill

This week, I met with the Republican members of the House Agriculture Committee to discuss the latest on the farm bill. Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any strong movement toward resolving the differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill and the requests made by the White House. I am disappointed that this is the case. I was hopeful the farm bill would receive immediate attention in January. I will continue to push for the bill to be concluded in a timely manner, but at this point, there is no evidence of House and Senate leadership pushing for this to happen.

## Sponsoring Legislation to Ensure Medical Care is Available for Rural Veterans

On Thursday, I participated in a hearing of the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Health to consider several bills intended to ensure veterans receive the highest quality medical care. The hearing featured a measure I sponsored with Representative Phil Hare of Illinois to establish a full time Director of Physician Assistant Services within the Department of Veterans Affairs. Physician Assistants are crucial to providing medical care in rural and other underserved areas, often serving as the only health care professional available. I want to ensure that Physician Assistants are fully integrated and well utilized to provide veterans living in rural communities timely access to quality care. I am hopeful that Congress will act this year to approve this legislation.

## Addressing the Pharmacist Shortage, Visiting KU Pharmacy School

Pharmacists play a critical role in our Kansas communities. Unfortunately, we have seen pharmacy doors closing in different counties throughout the state over the past year. En route back to Washington, D.C., I visited the Kansas University School of Pharmacy to tour the facility and meet with Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Richard Lariviere and Pharmacy School Dean Ken Audus. We discussed the shortage of pharmacists and KU's plans to expand its pharmacy degree program.

The degree program currently accepts 105 students per year. Under KU's proposal, nearly 200 more students would be able to enter the program through the University's location in Wichita and a proposed new building in Lawrence. The proposal will come before the state legislature this year for consideration. I appreciate the efforts of KU to expand its program and thank Vice Chancellor Lariviere and Dean Audus for their time with me. I offered to help do what I can to signify the importance of this expansion to our state legislators, as well as to explore federal funding opportunities.

#### Attending the Kansas University and Kansas State University Basketball Games

Basketball has long been a tradition to many Kansans. This week, I attended a pair of Big 12 basketball games. On Monday, I was in Lawrence to watch Kansas play Oklahoma. The Jayhawks recorded an impressive victory and remain unbeaten on the season. I enjoyed sitting and visiting with Chancellor Robert Hemenway and his wife, Leah. On Saturday, I was in Manhattan to watch Kansas State take on Texas A&M. It was an exciting game with K-State defeating the Top 10 Texas A&M team 75 to 54. I wish all of our Kansas basketball teams the best this season.

#### Visiting with Fellow Rotarians in Overland Park

I attended a meeting of the Overland Park Rotary this week at the invitation of Dr. Mary Cohen. As a Rotarian, I understand the important role civic clubs plays in our communities. From Kansas City to Liberal, civic clubs across the state have the same goal of making their community a better place. I appreciated the opportunity to visit with Rotarians in Johnson County.

## Discussing Transportation Issues with Leading Trucking Company

After attending Rotary in Overland Park, I met with YRC Worldwide CEO Bill Zollar and Mike Kelley to discuss the release of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission Report and the upcoming 2009 transportation bill. YRC Worldwide is a Fortune 500 company and one of the largest transportation service providers in the world. Headquartered in Overland Park, the company employs about 66,000 people and has terminals located in communities like Goodland and Liberal. As a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I visited with Bill and Mike about the conditions of our national highways, environmental regulations and highway congestion problems. I appreciated the opportunity to learn more about their operation and the challenges they face.

## Visiting with Kansans during Smoky Hills Public Television Program

Yesterday, I appeared on a live call-in show on Smoky Hills Public Television. It was a good opportunity to hear directly from Kansans about what is on their minds. I was happy to take several calls and share my opinions on a number of topics, including the farm bill, health care and energy. Thanks to Fort Hays State University Assistant Professor Chapman Rackaway and Hays Daily News Editor and Publisher Patrick Lowry for leading the program. The program will be rebroadcast on Sunday, January 27 at 6:00 p.m.

## Big First Listening Tour Continues

I continued my listening tour with a stop in Buhler in Reno County yesterday. My tour will continue this week with several stops. They are scheduled as follows:

Tuesday, January 22

Jewell County Tour Stop, Mankato

Time: 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Location: Community Center, Meeting Room, 214 N. High, Suite 1

Osborne County Tour Stop, Downs

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

Location: Rotary Club, United Methodist Church of Downs, Basement, 1000 N. Morgan

Wednesday, January 23

Mitchell County Tour Stop, Beloit

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

Location: Lions Club, North Central Kansas Technical College, Student Union Conference Room, 3033 US Highway 24

Lincoln County Tour Stop, Lincoln

Time: 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Location: Finch Theater, Community Room, 122 E. Lincoln Ave.

Ottawa County Tour Stop, Bennington

Time: 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Location: Bennington High School Cafeteria, 301 N. Putnam

Thursday, January 24

Ellsworth County Tour Stop, Ellsworth

Time: 7:00-8:00 a.m.

Location: Kiwanis Club, Crossroads Restaurant, Highway 140 and Highway 156 Junction

Rice County Tour Stop, Bushton

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

Location: Bushton Community Center, 301 N. Main St.

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

In the Office

Judi O'Grady of Eudora and Kara Cunningham of Baldwin City were in the office with CureSearch to talk about the need to fund childhood cancer research.

Very truly yours,

Jerry