

2/19/2008 This Week in Congress

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February 19, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

Potential Changes in Agriculture Shipping Rules Would Hurt Farmers

The Kansas Corporation Commission (KCC) recently proposed changes to its interpretation of a regulation regarding commercial motor vehicles and the movement of goods within and across state lines. The change in interpretation would affect Kansas farmers hauling grain to local elevators and cattle to Kansas sale barns. This week, I met with KCC officials to discuss the regulations.

While federal law regulates interstate commerce or trade between states, each state has the authority to set rules on intrastate commerce or trade within its borders. Historically, KCC has allowed most deliveries of grain from a Kansas farm to a market located within Kansas to be considered intrastate commerce. Now, however, KCC is proposing to consider the transportation of grain from a Kansas farmer to a local elevator as interstate commerce since the grain may ultimately be sold to an out-of-state buyer.

If KCC moves forward with this new interpretation, Kansas farmers would be subject to federal transportation rules designed for truckers. A farmer should not have to meet the same standards as that of someone whose sole job responsibility is the transportation of goods. Complying with these federal rules would raise the cost of business for farmers. I am working with KCC and state legislators to develop a policy that is compliant with federal law and at the same time limits the impact on the Kansas agriculture industry. [Click here to listen to my thoughts on this topic.](#)

Farm Bill Future Still Uncertain

This week, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson and Ranking Member Bob Goodlatte sent a spending proposal to the Senate in hopes it would jumpstart stalled negotiations on how much the farm bill will cost. It appears the Senate Agriculture Committee is working on a response that will include more spending. While the White House has said it will allow the amount of spending in the recent Peterson-Goodlatte proposal, it is unsure where the additional revenue will be found in either plan.

It is time for Congress and the White House to remember that the farm bill is primarily about farmers and making sure they are able to provide food and fuel for our country and many others around the world. Differences must be worked out so an adequate safety net is provided for farmers and ranchers along with the hungry in our communities.

Beef Trade and Darfur Raised with Chinese Ambassador

I met with Chinese Ambassador H.E. Zhou Wenzhong on Monday after he gave a Landon Lecture at Kansas State University. I spoke to the Ambassador about American beef supply and urged the Chinese to fully open their market. Since 2003, when the first case of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) was found in the U.S., beef trade with China has been nonexistent. The Chinese market represents a real opportunity for Kansas producers to expand their business. I will continue working to help our ranchers gain access to China.

Additionally, I was encouraged to see the issue of China's role in the Darfur conflict addressed during the Ambassador's lecture. Constant pressure on the Chinese government is necessary for it to realize that supporting the Sudanese government only allows further killing in Darfur. I recently joined other Members of Congress in an attempt to persuade Chinese President Hu Jintao to take a firm stand against the violence.

Visiting with Marysville High School Students from Washington, D.C.

I make an effort every year to visit high school classes to speak to students about the importance of being active citizens. The decisions Congress makes today will affect young people for many years to come and they have a stake in making sure their voices are heard.

On Thursday, I visited with seniors in Ami Johnson's government class at Marysville High School. Using video conference technology, I was able to have a conversation with the students from Washington, D.C. We discussed high fuel prices, No Child Left Behind and ways to improve the economy.

Speaking to Kansas Community College Trustees and Presidents

I attended an event hosted by the Kansas Association of Community College Trustees this week in Washington, D.C., where representatives from many of the 19 community colleges in Kansas were present. The event was a good opportunity to update trustees and presidents on action in Washington, D.C. and to learn about issues important to the colleges. I spoke to the group about the Higher Education Act, my continued support for financial aid programs, and career and technical education programs under the Carl D. Perkins Act. I appreciated the time the trustees and community college presidents took to share their expertise with me.

In addition, many representatives took time to visit with me in my office. Gary Eppler and Larry Kiley with Pratt Community College were in to emphasize the need for educational services that help disabled students. Hutchinson Community College President Ed Berger was in to tell me about plans to renovate the current science building on campus into a Physical and Biotechnology Science Center to better prepare students for health-related professions. Cloud County Community College President Richard Underbakke and Faith Nyswonger of Concordia were in to underline the importance of the Higher Education Act and to bring me up-to-date on the college's wind energy project. Dr. Jackie Vietti and Ted Dankert of El Dorado, Ted Albright of Towanda and Carter Zerbe of Augusta were in with Butler Community College to discuss the importance of Carl Perkins programs and the Higher Education Act.

Speaking to Kansas Health Professionals

With more than 20,000 Kansans living in our state's 350 nursing facilities, long term care providers play an important role in providing Kansans with accessible and affordable health care. This week, I had the opportunity to speak at the Kansas Health Care Association Conference in Topeka about long term care, training and retaining a quality work force and the need for adequate reimbursement for Medicaid and Medicare services. Thanks to Kansas Health Care Association CEO Cindy Luxem for the invitation to address the group.

Meeting with Kansas State University College Republicans

Before the Landon Lecture at K-State, I met with members of the College Republicans in the KSU Student Union to discuss a handful of topics. Members asked me about our nation's energy policy and its impact on our region and state, the 2008 general election and the importance of keeping Kansas communities viable. Former interns in my office Taylor Calcara of Great Bend, Abby Dechant of Garden City and Mike Koss of Haddam also spoke to the group about their experience serving Kansans in our nation's capital. Thank you to President George Weston and the rest of the members for participating in the discussion.

Discussing Economic Development in Kansas

After returning to Kansas this week, I attended a breakfast at the third annual Governors' Summit on Regional Economic Development hosted by the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce. Education, tax policy, health care and opportunities to benefit from renewable fuels were all discussed throughout the morning.

Creating economic opportunity for Kansans is a goal we all share. I appreciated the opportunity to meet with local business and community leaders and discuss ways to bring jobs to our state.

Enjoying the United Methodist Women's Soup Supper in Hays

This weekend, I attended the United Methodist Women Soup Supper at the First United Methodist Church in Hays. Thank you to all who worked to prepare such a wonderful meal. I enjoyed visiting with several friends and community members while there.

Cheering on the Fort Hays State Tigers

The Fort Hays State University men's and women's basketball teams played Missouri Western on Saturday evening. Both FHSU teams won, with the women winning a close game 81-79 and the men winning 65-52. I enjoyed watching the two teams play and visiting with folks at the game.

Honoring the Life of Lydia Porubsky

On Friday, I attended the funeral of Lydia Porubsky of Topeka. Mrs. Porubsky and her late husband Charles Sr. owned and operated Porubsky's Grocery and Meats for 61 years. As a state legislator, I was a frequent patron at Porubsky's. Lydia continued to work at the business until the week before her death.

Lydia's legacy will live on at Porubsky's as her family will continue to sell her renowned chili. My thoughts and prayers are with the Porubsky family as I join in celebration of this wonderful woman's life.

Big First Listening Tour Continues

I continued my listening tour with stops this week in Council Grove, Atwood, Oberlin and Norton. Earlier today, I was in Holcomb and Cimarron. I am in Kansas this week for the President's Day District Work Period and will be in the following communities:

Thursday, February 21

Cheyenne County Tour Stop, St. Francis

Time: 10:30-11:30 a.m.

Location: Main Street Coffee, 216 W. Washington

Wallace County Tour Stop, Sharon Springs

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

Location: Rotary Club, Stephen's Restaurant, Junction 27 & 40

Friday, February 22

Ness County Tour Stop, Ransom

Time: 8:30-9:30 a.m.

Location: VFW Post #7972, 398 S. Vermont Ave.

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

In the Office

Sunee Mickle of Topeka was in with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas to discuss telemedicine issues. Michael Byinton and Mark Coates of Topeka were in with the Kansas Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired to talk about the importance of accessing telecommunications systems and services sold by virtual businesses. Judy Krtek of Kansas City was in representing the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation to tell me about the need for continued support of the National Institutes of Health and other research to find a cure for diabetes. Dr. Donald and Kay Brada of Wichita were in representing the Kansas Psychiatric Society to advocate for increased Medicare reimbursement and more mental health professionals in rural areas. Paige Hatcher of Haven was in with the American Medical Student Association to discuss the Physician Payments Sunshine Act.

Elmer Ronnenbaum of Seneca and Darrell Schlabach of Hanover were in with the Kansas Rural Water Association to explain water quality rules and their impact on Kansas rural water districts. Ernie Abbott and Noman Williams of Hays and Stuart Lowery of Topeka were in with the Kansas Electric Cooperatives to talk about federal reimbursement for damages to electric cooperatives from recent winter storms. Colonel Gary Major, Lieutenant Leticia Dreiling and Kathy Klein of the 89th Regional Readiness Command (RRC) in Wichita were in to brief me on issues affecting the 89th RRC and Army Reservists. Mark Swope of Lansing was in with the American Federation of Government Employees to talk about issues affecting the Federal Bureau of Prisons and a new federal prison being considered in Leavenworth.

Kansas Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart Raymond Rhodd and Sandra Davern of Topeka were in to discuss ways to improve veterans' health care and benefits. Thelma Bray of Silver Lake and Bea Bacon of Olathe were in with the National Silver Haired Congress to discuss the need for geriatric education for future health care professionals. Marian Adams of Wichita was in with the Internal Revenue Service's Taxpayer Advocate Service to discuss problems encountered by Kansas taxpayers. Jess Fisher of Ark City and Jim and Debbie Brown, John and Jan Rogers and Sherry Workman, all of Wichita, were in with ABC Lease Purchase and Sales to talk about the growing support for the Consumer Rental Purchase Agreement Act. Also joining them was Gloria Homeier of Russell.

In my office for a tour of the U.S. Capitol building were Melvin Purdue of Abilene, Josh Hubin of Hanston and Jim and Kaye Vaughan of Kismet.

Very truly yours,

Jerry