

## 3/10/2008 This Week in Congress

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March 10, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

Asking the Secretary of Defense to Suspend Tanker Contract

I joined the Kansas congressional delegation this week in asking Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to suspend the Air Force's new air refueling tanker contract with Northrop Grumman and European Aeronautic Defence and Space (EADS) until Congress can thoroughly review the decision and take appropriate action. Especially during this time of economic uncertainty, we should not be sending thousands of jobs overseas. In Kansas alone, Boeing's proposal would create or sustain 3,800 jobs and is worth \$145 million annually, important investments that Europe now stands to gain.

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The Air Force has a great deal of explaining to do. In addition to pointing out the harm to our country's national and

economic security, we also expressed to Secretary Gates our concerns that the tanker selection competition was unfair to Boeing and poorly executed. For example, the Air Force failed to account for foreign government subsidies, which made the cost of the Airbus tanker more competitive and biased the results against the domestic manufacturer. [Click here to read the letter to Secretary Gates.](#)

On Wednesday, I attended a House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee hearing where Members of Congress began to question Air Force officials about the tanker contract. In the coming days, I am committed to working to ensure we make the right choice for Americans and America's military.

#### House Approves Measure Aimed at Providing Mental Health Services

Kansans need access to mental health and addiction services and Congress should help make sure these services are available. On Wednesday, the House passed the Paul Wellstone Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act. This legislation would require health insurers to offer mental health benefits equal in cost and scope to medical and surgical benefits.

While I support the concept of this legislation and voted in favor of parity while in the Kansas Senate, I voted against this bill because of a provision that allows the federal government to preempt state laws. Kansas already mandates that all employers provide mental health coverage for severe mental health problems. This preemption could be detrimental as employers would not be required to provide these benefits and might all together opt-out of providing mental health coverage. The Senate's version of this legislation does not include this provision. My hope is that the provision can be corrected and I can vote in favor of the final legislation.

#### Encouraging New Veterans Affairs Secretary to Support Kansas Veterans

I met with new Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) James Peake this week to discuss the importance of strong VA services for Kansas veterans. Secretary Peake began overseeing the VA in December and our meeting gave me a good opportunity to make the Secretary aware of issues important to Kansas veterans as he begins his tenure.

The Secretary and I talked about a number of issues affecting Kansas veterans, including ensuring resources for VA hospitals across the state, increasing access to medical care in rural areas, improving the timeliness of disability claims decisions and providing mental health services for soldiers returning from combat overseas. I appreciate Secretary Peake's commitment to improving care and services for our veterans and look forward to working with him. [Click here to read more about my visit with Secretary Peake.](#)

#### Grant Awarded for Construction of Fort Riley Veterans Cemetery

This week, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded a second and final grant to the State of Kansas to be used for completing construction of the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery. State veterans cemeteries provide burial space for those who have served a term of active duty and been honorably discharged from the military, reserves or National Guard, as well as their dependents.

This funding completes the total award amount. It is good to see all of the pieces in place for construction of the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery. Once complete, it will provide honorable burial space for thousands of Kansas veterans. [Click here to read more about the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery.](#)

## Kansas Communities Receive Grant to Fight Hunger and Homelessness

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) this week announced that 26 Kansas counties have received federal grants to strengthen local efforts that provide food and shelter to the hungry and homeless in Kansas. Counties received grants based on a formula that takes into consideration the current population, unemployment and poverty levels. FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program provides supplemental funding to things such as soup kitchens, shelters and food banks.

In Kansas, we look after our neighbors. Across our state, kind individuals, caring groups and churches help families struggling to make ends meet. These funds will support local projects that serve Kansans in need. [Click here to access the list of counties.](#)

## Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee Reviews the Railroad Industry

On Wednesday, I attended a Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads hearing about investment in railroad companies. Our railroads provide many public services and a very efficient mode of transportation to get products to market. With a weakened dollar there is some concern that foreign entities can invest in our nation's infrastructure at exceedingly discounted prices. The subcommittee also heard concerns about the potential impact of hedge funds investing in railroads.

## Visiting with County Officials from across the State

I joined county officials from across the state this week to discuss many current issues during the annual Kansas Association of Counties visit to Washington, D.C. We had a discussion about restoring the partnership between federal and local governments. It was great to see so many friendly faces in our nation's capital. Thanks to Executive Director Randy Allen for inviting me to speak to the group.

#### Attending the Kansas Prayer Breakfast

On Friday morning, I joined members of the Kansas legislature and other Kansans at the annual Kansas Prayer Breakfast in Topeka. For 47 years, state and community leaders have come together to experience the comfort and encouragement that comes from prayer. In addition to prayer, scripture readings and music, we heard from Carey Casey, CEO of the Kansas City-based National Center for Fathering. The Prayer Breakfast, sponsored by Topeka Fellowship Inc., was a good time for folks to come together to recognize the power of prayer.

#### Discussing Chiropractic Issues at Cleveland Chiropractic College

Before traveling back to Washington, D.C., I visited Cleveland Chiropractic College in Overland Park to meet with Dr. Carl Cleveland, President, and Dr. John Nab, Vice President of Alumni Service. Dr. Cleveland and Dr. Nab gave me a tour of the college and talked about many issues facing chiropractors in Kansas. We also discussed my efforts to allow veterans enrolled in the VA system to have access to chiropractic care and legislation before Congress to expand this benefit. The college recently moved to a new Kansas campus and I welcome them to our state.

## Discussing Jobs in Rural America at Hodgdon Powder Company

After visiting Cleveland Chiropractic College, I stopped by the headquarters of Hodgdon Powder Company in Shawnee Mission to meet with Bob Hodgdon. Hodgdon Powder is a leader in gunpowder and provides propellants and other products and services to sportsmen and other businesses. I visited the company's Morris County plant in 2003 where many rural Kansans are employed. I enjoyed visiting with Mr. Hodgdon about their expansion and investment in safety and environmental quality and regulatory issues.

## Big First Listening Tour Continues

From Capitol Hill to Bunker Hill, I continued my Listening Tour this week with stops in Marion, Chase, Wabaunsee and Dickinson Counties. After my stop in Dickinson County, I met with Herb Graves of the State Association of Kansas Watersheds to discuss the funding difficulties faced by watershed districts. My listening tour will continue next week. [Click here to view my upcoming schedule.](#)

## In the Office

Jack Taylor of Liberal was in with S.P.I.R.I.T. to discuss the widening of U.S. Highway 54 from two to four lanes. Jeff Seibel of Hays was in with Edward Jones to discuss data breach legislation and legislation that would allow an optional federal charter for insurance. Judy Billings of Lawrence was in with the Lawrence Convention and Visitor's Bureau to discuss the Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area. Steve and Cynthia Haynes of Oberlin were in with the National

Newspaper Association to express their support for a reporter's shield law and talk about improvements to the Freedom of Information Act that passed last year.

Members of the Kansas Credit Union Association were in to discuss legislation that would provide regulatory relief to credit unions. In with the group from Wichita were Duane VanCamp, Gary Regoli, Ken Greteman, Stephanie Farber, Marilyn Wells, Lee Williams, Mark Bowman, Larry Damm, Bob Thurman, Larry Eisenhower, John Davis, Marla Marsh, Jim Holt, Mike Welli and Sue Shelby. Also joining them were Raymond Stroud of Dodge City, Eric Schaefer of Garden City, Todd Brunner of Hutchinson, Mark Kelig of Norton and Robert Reeves of Manhattan.

Eileen Arnhold of Dorrance, Judy Smith of Muscotah, Randy Caprez of Russell and Janet Harness of Troy were in with the National League of Postmasters to talk about keeping rural post offices open and allowing voters to cast ballots by mail. Patrick Zollner of Topeka was in with the Kansas State Historical Society to talk about preservation efforts in Kansas. Allan Fritz of Wamego was in with the National Wheat Improvement Commission to discuss wheat research projects that affect Kansas. President and CEO Bill Moore and Jim Ludwig of Topeka were in with Westar Energy to talk about Westar Energy's future plans for electric generation and distribution in Kansas.

Jim Crosby of Pomona and Max Miller of Topeka were in with the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States to share their support for earlier retirement eligibility for members of the National Guard. Members of the Disabled American Veterans were in to discuss the VA budget and veterans benefits. In with the group were Franklin and Veronica Bergquist, Yorkie Smith, Curtiss Smith and Charles Lorings of Wichita; James and Ellen Price of Salina; Ken Ketchum of Lansing; Esther Dean-Zime of Leavenworth; and Christian Kramer of Topeka.

Bob and Lori Shrock of Kiowa, John Haas of Larned, Bill Heer of Hutchinson and Mike Stamm of Manhattan were in with the U.S. Canola Association to visit about canola breeding research programs and our nation's farm policy. Dave Ragan of Kansas City, Douglas Moorman of Leawood and David Foran of Lenexa were in with the National Treasury Employees Union to talk about the privatization of federal jobs and health care insurance for federal workers. Jane Rhys of Topeka, Leon Ostrander of Great Bend and Scott Shepherd of Overland Park were in with the Developmental Disabilities Council to discuss the Americans with Disabilities Restoration Act and the need for long term care services and support. Ginger Lewman of Emporia and Elaine Wellborn of Topeka were in representing the Kansas Association for the Gifted, Talented, and Creative to discuss the need to train teachers to identify high ability students. Dr. Gail Hansen of Lawrence was in with the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists to talk about workforce development issues and the need to create national reporting standards.

Scott Henson of Avondale West Elementary School in Topeka was in with the Kansas Association of Elementary School Principals to talk about the No Child Left Behind Act and the importance of supporting successful school programs. Representatives from the Kansas Association of Community Action Programs were in to discuss the importance of the Community Services Block Grant and federal support for other social programs such as Head Start. In with the group were Steven Lohr, Jamey Whitney and Linda Broyles of Girard; Tawny Stottlemire of Topeka; Tracy Ball of Welda; Jim Baze of Ozawkie and David Shrum of Garnett.

Dr. Kristin Bowman-James and Doug Byers of Lawrence were in with the University of Kansas to discuss National Science Foundation Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research and National Institutes of Health Institutional Development Award (IDeA) grants. Funds awarded through these grants have helped further research at KU and Kansas State University. Kevin Dobbs of Lawrence was in with the Kansas Biological Survey to discuss how satellite imaging and research provided by the KansasView program helped during the tornadoes and flooding of 2007. KansasView is a program that allows satellite images to be converted into usable data for research, teaching and learning. Velma Goertzen of Inman and J.D. Rein of Great Bend were in with the American Association for Homecare to tell me about the importance of durable medical equipment, oxygen therapy and homecare to Medicare beneficiaries.

Larry and Sharolyn Jackson, Fred Cholick and Steven Graham of Manhattan; Steve Irsik of Garden City; and Connie Pelton of Pittsburg were in with the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges to explain the importance of extension services and research provided by land-grant colleges across the state. Ken and Mary McCauley of White Cloud were in to discuss the status of the farm bill. Ken is currently serving as Chairman of the National Corn Growers Association. Anita Raghavan of Wichita was in with the Food Research and Action Center to explain how issues before Congress will affect Kansans experiencing hunger.

Sandy Johnson of Olathe and Susan Estes of Kansas City were in with the Mid-America Manufacturing Center to talk about the importance of American manufacturing to our economy and how the center helps small manufacturers learn to adapt, survive and continue to employ American workers. Joining them were Bill Schutte of Lenexa and David Doherty of Fort Scott to share their experiences working with the center. Christina Beasley of Smoky Valley High School in Lindsborg was in with the Congressional Youth Leadership Council to learn about the federal government.

Vernon and Nancy McKenzie of Emporia were in with the National Pest Management Association to explain how legislation currently in Congress could negatively affect this industry. Wally Kearns and Stan Compton of Topeka were in with the Kansas Small Business Development Center to share how this organization produces returns for our state by providing management and technical assistance to Kansans wishing to start, save or expand a small business. Steve Roberts, a Brown County Commissioner, of Hiawatha also stopped by to visit.

Several Kansans visited my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building, including Bernie and Rita Horner of Phillipsburg, James and Carrie Evins of Great Bend, Michael and Suzanne Bollig of Hays, Connie Vogts of Sublette, Cindy Jones of Kansas City and Kathy Sanko of Liberal.

Very truly yours,

Jerry