

3/17/2008 This Week in Congress

This Week in Congress

March 17, 2008

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." The House passed the 2009 budget this week. The budget is a blueprint for the coming year for spending and taxes and it sets the parameters for the spending bills that will follow. I have concerns with the budget on both the spending and tax side and voted against it. [Click here](#) to read an editorial I wrote this week about the importance of reducing the national debt. I am in Kansas and will be continuing my Big First Listening Tour during the Easter break. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Congress Passes One Month Extension of Farm Bill

This week, Congress passed a short-term extension of the 2002 Farm Bill for the second time in four months. Disagreement over funding levels has held up the farm bill process since before Christmas. Farmers and ranchers deserve more certainty than the inaction of Congress has given them. I was hopeful we would not get to this point, but this is what happens when the well-being of farmers and ranchers is not a high priority in Washington, D.C. [Click here](#) to read more.

House Improves Ethics Enforcement

The House passed a measure this week to strengthen congressional ethics enforcement. For the first time ever, an outside board will be established made up of individuals who are not Members of Congress to investigate alleged ethics violations by representatives. Members of Congress should be held to a high ethical standard. I supported this action to increase the openness and accountability of the ethics process to the American people.

The independent Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE) will consist of six members who will screen allegations of wrongdoing made against House Members and pass these concerns to the House Ethics Committee for further consideration and action.

Working to Improve Rail Service

There are more than 500 short line and regional railroads operating over 50,000 miles of track in our country today. Short line railroads are the arteries Kansas producers use to get their commodities to market. Without these important transportation pathways, Kansas farmers would have a much more difficult time shipping commodities.

Legislation I introduced became law in 2004 that gave short line railroads an incentive to invest in maintaining their rail lines. These incentives spurred investment in the more than 2,000 miles of short line rails in Kansas. According to a Kansas Department of Transportation study, short lines in western Kansas save the state \$49.5 million annually. In Washington, D.C., this week, I was honored to receive an award from the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association. The provisions encouraging investment have since expired and I am again working to extend tax incentives that will improve rail service in our state.

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

This week from Washington, D.C., I visited with the senior government class at Ulysses High School via video teleconferencing. This technology allows me to interact with students while I am in Washington, D.C. It is a great way to gain a better understanding of what is important to students. We visited about renewable energy, the local and regional economy, the upcoming Presidential election, the importance of voting and how No Child Left Behind affects students and teachers. I appreciated my time visiting with the students and their teacher Mary Schartz.

Visiting with Kansas Rural Leaders

I had the opportunity this week to speak to the Kansas Agriculture and Rural Leadership (KARL) Class IX when the group was in Washington, D.C. for its National Study Tour. KARL is a leadership program that brings together Kansas' agricultural and rural leaders to enhance communication skills and broaden perspectives. Class IX participants range in age from 25-55 years old and come from a wide range of business enterprises related to the agricultural industry and rural community development. Thanks to KARL President Jack Lindquist for the opportunity to visit with the group. I hope the group's time in our nation's capital will help the members become more effective leaders and advocates for rural America.

Members of this year's class that were in this week included Brooks Brenn of Herndon, Kirby Brunk of Arma, Susan Concannon of Beloit, Aaron Dunbar of Richmond, Mike Froebe of Mound Valley, Danielle Geesling of Turon, David Govert of Cunningham, Scott Hesse of Topeka, Wesley Hobbs of WaKeeney, Josh Jennings of Colby, Jay Joy of Sedgwick, Stephen Kalb of Wellsville, Nathan Kells of Satanta, Katie Kueser of Ellsworth, Jackie Lopez of Wichita, Frank Male of Lawrence, Mark Maris of Augusta, Fran Richmond of Lyndon, Rob Sage of Maple Hill, Lea Ann Seiler of Hanston, Mike Spinden of Cottonwood Falls, Brian Waugh of Oakley, Ken Woods of Larned and Emily Zwahlen of Cherokee. Also in with the group were Trevor McKeeman and Aaron Hund of Manhattan, Joe Carpenter and Stephanie Jacques of Wamego and Beth Torrey and Aaron Gerdes of Dodge City.

Speaking to Kansas Farm Bureau County Presidents

On Tuesday, I had the privilege of speaking at the Kansas Farm Bureau County President's Annual Washington, D.C., banquet. I enjoyed seeing so many friendly and familiar faces from across Kansas. County Farm Bureau presidents are leaders in their local farm communities and I was glad to have the opportunity to discuss current policy issues with them during their time in our nation's capital.

Attending Palm Sunday Services at College Church of the Nazarene

On Sunday, I attended services at the College Church of the Nazarene in Olathe. The church sits next to the campus of MidAmerica Nazarene University. I will be delivering the commencement address to the graduating seniors at the university in May. I enjoyed visiting the church on Palm Sunday.

Big First Listening Tour Continues

From Capitol Hill to Bunker Hill, I will continue my Listening Tour today with stops in Comanche and Clark Counties. I am

in downtown Coldwater this morning making stops at various local businesses on Main Street. Later this morning, I will be in Ashland visiting with community members on Main Street. On Friday, I will be in Barber and Pratt Counties. My upcoming schedule is below. You can also [click here](#) to stay up-to-date on the remainder of my stops that are still being scheduled.

Monday, March 17

Comanche County Tour Stop, Coldwater

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

Location: Main Street

Clark County Tour Stop, Ashland

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

Location: Main Street

Friday, March 21

Barber County Tour Stop, Hazelton

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

Location: Community Building, 414 E. Main

Pratt County Tour Stop, Pratt

Time: 4:00-5:00 p.m.

Location: Pratt Municipal Building, 117 W. 3rd

Monday, March 24

Greeley County Tour Stop, Tribune

Time: 11:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. MDT / 12:00-1:00 p.m. CDT

Location: Greeley County Hospital Lobby, 506 Third St.

Hamilton County Tour Stop, Syracuse

Time: 1:00-2:00 p.m. MDT / 2:00-3:00 p.m. CDT

Location: Hamilton County Library Meeting Room, 102 W. Avenue C

Kearny County Tour Stop, Lakin

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

Location: Kearny County Hospital, Classroom, 500 Thorpe

Tuesday, March 25

Haskell County Tour Stop, Satanta

Time: 8:15-9:15 a.m.

Location: Centera Bank Fiesta Room, 218 N. Sequoyah St.

Stanton County Tour Stop, Johnson City

Time: 10:15-11:15 a.m.

Location: Stanton County High School Auditorium, 200 W. Weaver

Grant County Tour Stop, Ulysses

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

Location: Rotary Club, Grant County Library, 215 E. Grant

Wednesday, March 26

Logan County Tour Stop, Oakley

Time: 3:45-4:45 p.m.

Location: Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center, Room A, 703 W. 2nd St.

In the Office

Peter Spokes of Kansas City was in with the National Center for Fathering to update me on the organization's work to help men be better dads. College students Matt Wagner of El Dorado, Lydia Peel and Roderick Patton of Olathe, Daryn Soldan and Amy Schultz of Manhattan, Nick Piper of Shawnee, Wayne Stoskopf of Hoisington, Alyson Rodee of Wichita and Rachel Kraushaar of Hutchinson were in as part of a Big XII student delegation to discuss the need to lower student loan interest rates. Dr. Frank Griffith and LuAnn Puvogel of Salina were in with the Physician Hospitals of America to discuss issues facing specialty hospitals. Phil Coleman-Hull of Emporia was in with the National Association of Foreign Student Assistance to explain the importance of study abroad opportunities for college students.

Matt and Kara Fullmer of Topeka were in with the American Student Dental Association to describe the shortage of dental care professionals in Kansas and tell me about the effects of methamphetamine use on teeth. Russell Plaschka of Moran, Steve Buss of Meriden and Joanelle Lucas of Newton were in with the American Career and Technical Teachers Association to advocate for the importance of career and technical education for Kansas students. Representatives from the Kansas Psychological Association were in to discuss mental health parity and access to mental health care for Kansas veterans. In with the group were Dr. Chris Ebberwien, Dr. Jason DeSelms, Dr. Carrie Crownover and Dr. Gary Hawley, all of Wichita.

Suzanne Bollig of Hays, Karen Schell of Emporia and Julia Downs of Overbrook were in with the Kansas Respiratory Care Society to discuss legislation that would expand reimbursement for treatment of Medicare patients. Helen Beteet of Overland Park and Shelly Cooper of Kansas City were in with Jack and Jill of America to discuss early childhood education and health care access for minority populations. Jennifer Currier of Gardner and Kirsten Sneid of Overland Park were in with Autism Speaks to advocate for passage of the Combating Autism Act and increased resources to improve autism research.

Martin Bates and Janie Stein of Salina were in to discuss human rights in Columbia and legislation establishing a peace tax fund. Mark Feathers of Emporia was in with the American Orthotic and Prosthetic Association to explain ways to decrease fraud and improve quality of care. CEO of Mercy Regional Health Center Dick Allen of Manhattan and Matt Hickam of Topeka were in to discuss health care issues and express concern over reimbursement rates for the Tri-Care program. Sandy Procter of Manhattan was in with the Kansas Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program to tell me about success in the program.

Bob Wing, Dan Porter and Tom Kanatzer of Kansas City and Matt Jackson of Junction City were in with the Kansas Firefighters Association to talk about health insurance for early retirees, national safety standards and disability benefits. Paula Marmet of Topeka was in with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment to discuss the importance of funding chronic disease prevention programs. Tim Lutgen of Osborne was in with Star Seed to talk about biofuels research and the farm bill. Greg Hildenbrand of Topeka was in with Life Star of Kansas to talk about issues facing the air ambulance industry.

Richard Lopez and Oscar Interiano of Wichita were in with SER Corporation to explain the labor needs in Kansas and express support for training agricultural workers. Eric Guenther of Ottawa was in with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to discuss legislative proposals that will help FSA credit specialists better serve farmers and ranchers. Larry and Diana Enfield of Norton and Pam Scott of Topeka were in with the Kansas Funeral Directors Association to explain ways the government can encourage individuals to set aside money for funeral expenses.

Ron Casey of Topeka was in with Kansas Radiologic Technologists to advocate for setting national standards to reduce error rates. Steve Riegel of Ford was in with Cenex Harvest States to talk about his business in Kansas and legislative priorities in pending energy and farm legislation. Sally Cauble of Liberal, Ken Willard of Hutchinson and Clay Kubicek of Columbus were in with the Kansas Board of Education to discuss educational priorities within the state. Hutchinson city officials were in to discuss their priorities for the year. The group included Vice Mayor Trish Rose, Councilman Dave Razo, City Attorney Carolyn Patterson and City Manager John Deardoff.

Kimberly Gencur Svaty of Topeka was in with Gencur Svaty Public Affairs to discuss ITC Great Plains' electric transmission projects planned in Kansas. Ken, Mary Lynn and Alexander Baker of Hutchinson were in with the Reno County Wind Energy Task Force to discuss Reno County's efforts to attract wind development. Tom Tunnell and Michele Brady of Topeka and Dean Vakas of Overland Park were in with the Association of American Railroads and American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association to talk about the importance of short line tax credits and the role railroads play in the national transportation system.

City Commissioner Jim Sherer of Dodge City was in to discuss some of this year's priorities for Dodge City. Manhattan

Mayor Pro Tem Mark Hatesohl, Commissioner Bruce Snead, Commissioner Jim Sherow, City Manager Ron Fehr and Assistant City Manager Jason Hilgers were in with the City of Manhattan to update me on various topics regarding Manhattan's airport. Victor White and Charlie Fletcher of Wichita were in with the Wichita Airport Authority to update me on the new terminal renovation taking place at Wichita's Mid-Continent Airport. Ottawa Mayor Blake Jorgensen, City Manager Richard Nienstedt and Commissioners Sara Humm, Raquel Fleer and Deb Henningsen were in representing the City of Ottawa to discuss their priorities for the community. Also in with the group were Bill Henningsen, Lisa Rivers and youth delegates Ben Manis and Hannah Bryan.

Lance Rezac of Onaga, Craig Gigstad of Valley Falls, Kenlon Johannes of Topeka, Charles Atkinson of Great Bend and Dennis Hupe of Perry were in with the Kansas Soybean Association to share their ideas on ways the farm bill can best provide a safety net for farmers and encourage the use of soybeans in many different products. Matt and Trissa McCabe of Buhler were in with Kansas Farm Bureau to talk about issues affecting production agriculture in our state. Deborah Gann of Wichita was in with Spirit AeroSystems to discuss Boeing's protest of the Air Force's tanker decision.

Chuck Stones of Topeka, Kent Neeham of Overbrook, Mike Stevens of Sublette, Craig Meader of Burlington and Steve McSpadden of Winfield were in with the Kansas Bankers Association to discuss legislation pending before the House that effects Kansas banks. Mayor Lynn Peterson, City Commissioner Judy Leyerzapf and City Manager Mark Arbuthnot of Abilene were in to discuss road improvement projects in Abilene. Members of the Kansas Public Transportation Association were in to talk about support for mass transit funding in Kansas. In with the group were Executive Director Tuck Duncan, Janlyn Nesbett-Tucker, Jim Daniel and Jack and Tillie Alexander of Topeka; Paul Faber of Wichita; and Cliff Galante of Lawrence.

Lougene Marsh of Emporia was in with the Flint Hills Community Health Center to discuss the expanded mission of providing dental care and other health care services for low income and medically underserved communities. Bob Johnson Jr. and Bill Maasen of Blue Valley, Doug Vance of Topeka, Dawn Grosdidier of Lenexa, Tom McEvoy of Emporia, Doug Kupper of Wichita and Michael Meadors of Olathe were in with the Kansas Recreation and Parks Association to talk about the importance of recreation in building healthy communities and environmental education. Bob and Dian Boaldin of Elkhart were in with Epic Touch to discuss National Guard compensation and support for community education and after school programs.

Terry Holdren of Topeka was in with Kansas Farm Bureau to discuss the farm bill and agriculture transportation issues. Members of the Mo-Ark Association were in to discuss infrastructure projects along the Kansas and Missouri Rivers. In with the group were Ron Blakley, Jim Buckler, Larry Brennan, Steve Dailey, Dan Fuhrman, Lynda Hoffman, David

Howlett, Karin Jacoby, Bill Jackson, John Lagomarcino, Deuce Livers, John Patrick and Marjorie Price, all of the Kansas City area. Air Force Colonel Joseph Schwarz of Colby stopped by to visit. Colonel Schwarz is Commander of the 61st Air Base Wing at Los Angeles Air Force Base in California. Gerald and Linda Franklin of Goodland also dropped by to talk about the farm bill and other issues affecting western Kansas. State Treasurer Lynn Jenkins also stopped by to visit.

Many Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building. In were Jason, Chris, Clayton and Dustin Schneider of Schoenchen; Bob, Ross and Victoria Slinkard of Medicine Lodge; Michael, Angee, Andrew and Bailey Morgan of Lyndon; Diane and Alissa Tombaugh and Marabeth Conner of Clay Center; Terry, Wendy and Daniel Conway and Diane Young of Salina; and Steve, Peggy, Cynthia and Hennesse Showalter of Inman. In from Hutchinson were Stephanie, Brandon and Brandy Showalter and Casey, Sharon and Justin Swarts. Also in were Jim Hanson of Assaria, Sue Pingleton of Shawnee Mission, Robin Dunn and Kirsten Henzlik of Wellsville, Harvey and Joan Ulmer of Arlington and Delbert and Shirley Heier of Park.

Very truly yours,

Jerry