

4/07/2008 This Week in Congress

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April 7, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

Reviewing Federal Aviation Administration Maintenance Regulations

A recent investigation by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee uncovered more than 100 cases of aircraft being operated in commercial service despite being out of compliance with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regulations and inspections. On Thursday, I attended a hearing about the FAA's airline maintenance supervision where we heard from FAA officials, inspectors, and airline and labor representatives.

FAA inspectors testified that managers were ignoring warnings that some aircraft should be grounded for violating FAA safety regulations. The inspectors claimed the supervisors were too lenient on some airlines and that some planes flew even after concerns were made known. This is unacceptable.

The number one priority of the FAA must be safety. Not following procedure and the lack of oversight in this particular case is very troubling to me. I will work to see that corrective actions are taken and continue to make sure the FAA is meeting the public trust in regard to safety. In addition to examining what happened, the Committee focused on how this occurred and is working to prevent such a situation from happening again.

Continued Farm Bill Frustrations

This week, I held two meetings with congressional leaders to discuss the progress of the farm bill. On Tuesday, I met with Senator Pat Roberts to discuss ways to ensure a strong safety net for Kansas producers. Increasingly, there is pressure to cut programs that are essential to Kansas producers. The meeting was an opportunity for Senator Roberts and I to find ways to keep the emphasis of the farm bill on producers and maintaining the safest, most abundant and affordable food supply in the world.

I also met with Republican Leader John Boehner to determine how we can move the farm bill process forward, while keeping emphasis on America's farmers and ranchers. This new bill has been heavily influenced by people and groups with interests outside rural America. In addition, the time to complete a farm bill is growing short. The current short-term extension of the 2002 Farm Bill ends on April 18, 2008.

General Petraeus to Report to Congress, Combat Tours May Be Shortened

As I return to Washington, D.C., this week, I am looking forward to hearing from General David Petraeus, commander of U.S. forces in Iraq. Petraeus and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, who first appeared before Congress in September, will again provide an update on political and military progress in Iraq, as well as make recommendations for future troop levels.

It has also been reported that the Administration may this week announce that combat tours for soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan will be reduced from 15 months to 12 months beginning later this summer. I would welcome this news of shorter deployments. Repeated and extended deployments have put a tremendous strain on our servicemembers and their families.

Visiting Colombia with U.S. Trade Representative

I joined U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab this weekend in a two-day visit to Colombia. Ambassador Schwab led a small group of Members of Congress to Colombia to meet with President Alvaro Uribe and other officials to promote agricultural trade for American farmers and ranchers and view progress in the fight against drugs.

Colombia is our largest export market for U.S. agriculture products in South America. America's two-way trade with Colombia reached \$18 billion in 2007, making Colombia our fourth largest trading partner in Latin America. In 2007, total U.S. goods exports to Colombia reached \$8.6 billion.

In addition to meeting with the President, we met with Trade Minister Luis Guillermo Plata, Attorney General Mario Iguaran, Members of the Colombian Congress, labor and trade union leaders, members of the business community and demobilized combatants. We also visited a farm that was once used to grow coca - a main ingredient in the production of cocaine. The farm is a project to replace coca production with a useful commodity and provide employment to displaced citizens and demobilized combatants. While at the farm, I was able to visit with workers about the changes and the ongoing fight against drugs in Colombia.

It was a valuable opportunity to travel with the U.S. Trade Representative and be involved in discussions with Colombian officials. I wanted to see for myself the opportunities for Kansas agriculture, as well as the fight against drugs and the circumstances surrounding human rights violations. [Click here to view photos from my visit.](#)

Farm Service Agency Evaluates Conservation Reserve Program Burning

Producers and rural Kansans have become concerned about the burning of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres as a management practice. This week, Bill Fuller, Executive Director for the Kansas Farm Service Agency, provided County Operating Committees in Kansas with the ability to evaluate the dangers of burning CRP and, where warranted, allow the committees to give local producers the ability to forego burning. Meanwhile, the formal process is underway at the U.S. Department of Agriculture to give producers better access to the options of haying and grazing as management practices. This will be a lengthy process with no guarantees. I appreciate the Kansas FSA and Mr. Fuller for their efforts to be flexible and producer-friendly.

Kansas Woman Nominated for "America's Favorite Mom"

Last fall, I nominated Nick and Jennifer Keller of Home City as a 2007 "Angel in Adoption" for their concern and work on behalf of children who were exposed to methamphetamine while in the womb. The Keller's have adopted six children, each of whom were exposed to methamphetamine before birth, and are advocates for enacting laws that protect children from pregnant women that use illegal substances. Nick and Jennifer are true heroes and an inspiration to many, including me. [Click here to watch a video clip about the Keller's that I participated in for the Multijurisdictional Counterdrug Task Force Training Program.](#)

Jennifer is currently a finalist in a contest called "America's Favorite Mom." To celebrate the 100th anniversary of Mother's Day, several companies are sponsoring this event to honor mothers across the country. [Click here to visit the "America's Favorite Mom" Web site to honor a special mom you know.](#) [Click here to read about Jennifer Keller and cast your vote in support of her.](#)

In the Office

Bill Hanson of Manhattan was in with the American Association of Crop Insurers to discuss crop insurance policy as it relates to the farm bill. Larry Tiffany and Albert Esquivel of Topeka, Gary Townson of Wichita and Bill McIntyre of Kansas City were in with the National Association of Postal Supervisors to explain the benefits of voting by mail and discuss federal employee sick-leave policies. Charles Yunker of Topeka, Dan and Sandy Roberson of Olathe, Frances Swensen of Junction City, Dave Thomas of Leavenworth and LaVeta Miller of Larned were in with the Kansas American Legion to talk about veterans' health, education and benefits legislation. Former State Senator Dave Corbin of Topeka was in with the Kansas Department of Revenue to update me on legislation authorizing a streamlined sales tax system among the states.

LTG Rich Keller (Ret.) of Leavenworth was in with the Military Officers Association of Kansas to talk about improving TRICARE in Kansas and military benefits. Dave Sanderson of Salina, Carolyn Bloom of Lawrence and Wenda Peresic of Kansas City were in with Kansas Physical Therapists to discuss improving access to physical therapists. Geary County School District officials were in to talk about the importance of Impact Aid programs and the need to expand their elementary school capacity due to the growth at Fort Riley. In with the group were Superintendent Ronald Walker, Lisa Osbourn and Larry Dixon of Junction City.

Kevin Glendening and Tom Thull of Topeka and Ken Torgler of Overland Park were in with the Kansas State Bank Supervisors to discuss housing and mortgage reform legislation. Jean and Darrell Bryant of Cimarron and Jim Morford of Ellsworth were in with the Kansas Association of Homes and Services for the Aging to talk about the importance of Medicaid adequately reimbursing nursing homes and the need for long term care reform. Dr. Christopher Habben of Lenexa and Jennifer Jay of Wichita were in with the Kansas Association for Marriage and Family Therapy to discuss the role of marriage and family therapists in the VA, Medicare and schools.

Dr. Todd Goodson, Kim Osenga and Matt Skillen of Manhattan and Vick Sherbert of Wakefield were in with the Flint Hills Writing Project to talk about the importance of helping teachers develop their abilities to teach writing to students. Dee Likes and Matt Teagarden of Topeka, Tracy Brunner of Ramona, Todd Allen of Wichita, Ron Shortbridge of Garden City, Beth Patterson of Yates Center and John Gillcrist of Kansas City were in with the Kansas Livestock Association to share their thoughts on the progress of the farm bill, advocate for increased market access for Kansas beef and discuss renewable fuels. Kazakhstani exchange student Aygerim Tulepbergenova of Hutchinson was in with the Future Leaders Exchange to learn more about my role as a Member of Congress.

Jane Kelly of Topeka was in with the Kansas Home Care Association to talk about home care services in rural areas. Art Brown of Kansas City was in with the Mid-America Lumbermens Association to advocate for the Innocent Sellers Fairness Act. Justin Der of Atchison and John Mitchell of Kansas City were in with the City of Atchison to discuss Atchison's combined sewer outflow project.

Leadell Ediger and Peggy Goodwin of Salina; Reva Wywadis and Laurie Pigg of Topeka; Marcie Cone, Lana Messner and Clairrsa Maddy of Wichita; Misty Elder of Concordia; and Patty Peschel of Manhattan were in with the Kansas Association of Child Care and Resource and Referral Agencies to explain the importance of educated child care professionals and the need for child care development block grants. Members of the Kansas Medical Society were in to discuss pay for performance issues and the need to prevent Medicare physician cuts. In with the group were Dr. Charles and Nancy Craig of Newton, Dr. Jacque Amspacker and Dr. Joseph Simone of Shawnee Mission, Nancy Sullivan of Holton, Karla Degner and Letty Shaw of Hutchinson and Dr. Mary Redmon and Dr. Mark Meyer of Kansas City.

Dr. Roy Jensen and Erica Brown of Kansas City were in with the University of Kansas Cancer Center to advocate for increased grant funding through the National Institutes of Health. Kati Beam, Eric Goering and Kristin Hoffman of McPherson were in with the Christian Citizenship Seminar to express their concern for those suffering in Darfur, Sudan, and talk about ways the U.S. government can be involved in a responsible manner.

Dr. Richard McNary of El Dorado was in to tell me about the vision of the newly organized international food aid group named Numana. Kerri Spielman, Sue Ann Schultz and Larry Magill of Topeka; Greg Renn of Wellington; Bob and Robby Fee of Hutchinson; Wade and Christine Teagarden of LaCygne; Scott Stuckey of Junction City; Shannon Moore of Montezuma; and Gene Brake of Lenexa were in with the Kansas Association of Insurance Agents to talk about proposals that would increase federal oversight of the insurance industry.

Dick Brown of Hutchinson was in with Krause Corporation to talk about the importance of affordable health care and open steel trade to manufacturers in Kansas. Kyla Clawson of Satanta, Anthony Seiler of Valley Center, Clare Carlson of Shawnee, David Hanks of Reading and Eric Otte of Wichita were in with 4-H to visit.

Stopping by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol were Brandon and Sarah Kauffman of Wichita and Darrell and Jean Bryant of Cimarron.

Very truly yours,

Jerry