

4/28/2008 This Week in Congress

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April 28, 2008

Dear Friend,

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

Meeting with Agriculture Secretary to Discuss Continued Farm Bill Delays

On Wednesday, I met with Secretary of Agriculture Ed Shafer. This was my first time visiting with Secretary Shafer, who took over as head of USDA in January. I took the opportunity to discuss the lack of progress on the farm bill and ideas that would speed up passage of a bill. The Secretary and I agree that as spring planting begins and summer harvest approaches, farmers need to know what type of farm policy they will be operating under in the current crop year.

Late this week, a preliminary framework was agreed to by the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committee. We will know more about the framework as it is discussed in conference meetings over the course of the next several days, but from what I can tell, the priorities in this farm bill certainly do not reflect those of farmers and ranchers. Funding is being redirected out of programs that support producers and into non-agricultural programs. This is further evidence of movement in a direction that is less friendly to farmers in Kansas and the small towns they live in. As a member of the conference committee, I will be working to protect direct payments and the viability of crop insurance. Because a bill was not passed this week, the farm bill was extended an additional week.

I welcome your comments about the farm bill. [Click here](#) to send me a message.

Voting to Delay Medicaid Regulations

The House approved legislation this week to delay the implementation of seven Medicaid regulations for one year. Medicaid is a joint federal-state health insurance program for the poor. I am concerned these seven regulations would push more Medicaid costs on the states, narrow certain services provided by Medicaid and limit some state services eligible for federal reimbursements. Without congressional action to delay these new administrative rules, Kansas and other states would be forced to pay for more of the health care costs associated with Medicaid. This legislation now goes to the Senate for consideration.

Veterans' Benefits Bills Approved

I participated in a Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity hearing this week that approved several veterans' measures regarding housing, education and other benefits. The Subcommittee agreed to the Veterans Education Improvement Act, a bill to improve veterans' educational benefits and modernize the Montgomery G.I. Bill. This bill is the product of a series of Subcommittee hearings conducted since the beginning of last year to evaluate the G.I. Bill and explore improvements. The G.I. Bill should be updated, both to recognize the increased role of our Guard and Reserve members and to ensure that all veterans have the resources to attend school when they return from service. I am hopeful Congress will act soon to modernize the G.I. Bill.

Discussing our Nation's Rail Infrastructure

On Wednesday, I attended a Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads hearing to discuss rail capacity for our nation's railroads. Freight railroads currently move more than 40 percent of our nation's freight. The increase in demand for freight services is threatening to overload the current capacity of America's rail infrastructure. Much of the investment in rail infrastructure is made by the railroads themselves. During the hearing, we listened to various ideas on improving the amount of railroad track available throughout the country.

Testing New Vehicle Technology on Earth Day

Around the world on Tuesday, people marked Earth Day by taking time to consider ways to improve and protect our environment. I had the opportunity to test drive a plug-in hybrid electric car. With new advances in technology, these cars offer hope for reducing our dependence on foreign oil, cleaning up the environment and lowering fuel costs for American consumers. Plug-in hybrids can be recharged in standard electrical outlets and driven up to 60 miles without the use of gasoline. Statistics show the average American commutes 40 miles round trip each day. This technology would allow such a person to drive all day without using any gas.

Our foreign policy is distorted because of our reliance on oil from other countries. Switching to new forms of transportation that run on electricity or renewable fuels will make our country more secure and should help Kansans struggling to afford gas for their vehicles.

Senate Reaches Deal on FAA Bill

As more Americans travel by air, our nation's aging aviation infrastructure system becomes even more strained. We need a modern air traffic control system that can handle the increase in passengers in a safe and efficient manner. In September, I supported House passage of legislation to modernize the air traffic control system and fund the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) through 2011. While this bill passed the House, it had been stalled in the Senate. This week, an agreement was reached that will bring this bill to a vote in the next few days. Importantly, the Senate agreement does not include user-fees on general aviation. I worked successfully in the House to defeat a similar proposal that would have increased general aviation user fees. Many of the general aviation aircraft and parts are made in Kansas and this user fee proposal would have harmed the local and state economy, as well as individual pilots across the state.

Attending the Kansas State Society Cherry Blossom Banquet

On Tuesday, I joined Kansans for the annual Kansas Society of Washington, D.C., Cherry Blossom Banquet. The event in D.C. was a great opportunity to meet many Kansans who work in our nation's capital to preserve our way of life back home. I was honored to introduce the 2008 Kansan of the Year, Kroger Chairman and CEO Dave Dillon. Dillon was recognized for his leadership in working to rebuild the Dillons/KWIK Shop convenience and grocery store in Greensburg following the deadly tornado last year. Dillon's great-grandfather, J.S. Dillon, opened the first Dillon's grocery store in Hutchinson nearly a century ago. Congratulations also to the 2008 Kansas Cherry Blossom Princess Justine Sterling, originally of Kiowa.

Touring the Lewis and Clark Center at Fort Leavenworth

I visited the Lewis and Clark Center at Fort Leavenworth this week. This was my first visit to the Lewis and Clark Center since its opening in August 2007. The Lewis and Clark Center is the new home for the Command and General Staff College, which serves as a graduate school for approximately 1,200 Army majors and international military leaders. Following a tour of the facility, I met with Lieutenant General William Caldwell and State Representative Kenny Wilk. [Click here to view a photo from my visit.](#)

Visiting Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City

En route back to Washington, D.C., this week, I visited Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City for a tour of the hospital and to meet with members of the staff and Board of Directors. Children's Mercy Hospital is a comprehensive pediatric medical center and is ranked as one of the leading children's hospitals in the nation. It is the only Level I Pediatric Trauma Center located between St. Louis and Denver. Medical professionals provide care for children from birth to age 18.

I was impressed with the family-centered environment and the care they not only provide to the child, but also the support available for the families. The hospital staff shared with me several interesting statistics, including the fact that nearly one-fourth of all Kansas children admitted to any hospital are admitted to Children's Mercy. In 2007, Children's Mercy provided care for children from 101 of the 105 Kansas counties. Children's Mercy also operates a primary care clinic in Wyandotte County, a full service general pediatrics hospital in Overland Park and has outreach clinics in Hays, Manhattan, Pittsburg, Salina, Wichita and Junction City. [Click here to view photos from my visit.](#)

Attending a Reception at Sterling College in Honor of President Bruce Douglas

This weekend, I attended a reception honoring Sterling College President Bruce Douglas who is stepping down as head of the college. The reception was hosted by the Sterling College Board of Trustees. President Douglas and I have

worked together on many issues over the past several years. I appreciate his friendship and the good work he did at Sterling College. I wish him the best in his retirement.

In the Office

Jeff Borchardt of Olathe and Jeff Voge of Overland Park were in with the Kansas City Board of Trade to discuss recent occurrences in the commodity futures markets. Ruth Ann Wefald of Manhattan was in with Experience Works to tell me about the benefits this job training program provides to seniors and their communities. Rob Manes of Sedan was in with the Nature Conservatory to discuss conservation programs in the farm bill. Representatives from the City of Lawrence were in to discuss priorities for the city. The group included Sue Hack, Mike Dever, Bob Johnson, Bruce Passman, Linda Robinson, LaVerne Epp, Becca Booth, Dave Corliss and Bonnie Lowe.

Steve Johnson of Overland Park was in with ONEOK, Inc. to discuss progress on the company's liquid natural gas pipeline from Wyoming to Bushton, Kansas. Lisa Cornwell, Cierra Houlton and Andy Flores of Stafford were in to inform me of Stafford Middle School's efforts to prevent childhood obesity. Sunee Mickle of Topeka was in with Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas to share her thoughts on Medicare Advantage plans. Emporia State University President Mike Lane and Judith Heasley of Emporia were in to discuss the university's proposed bioscience initiative. Wayne Roberts of Wichita was in with the Pioneer Balloon Company to discuss legislation to amend the Consumer Product Safety Act. Carey Casey of Shawnee Mission was in with the National Center for Fathering to visit.

Jana, Brian, Trevor, and Matiel Lindley of Wamego were in with No Till on the Plains to introduce me to their organization and share the importance of no-tillage practices to the state of Kansas. Andy Haney of Ottawa was in with the American Public Works Association to explain ways the association believes Congress can help with our country's infrastructure. Dennis Schwartz of Tecumseh, Sharon Dwyer of Lawrence, Elmer Ronnebaum of Seneca and Tony Grant of Olathe were in with the Kansas Rural Water Association to discuss our mutual support of funding for rural water programs.

Gary Adams of Johnson was in with his wife, Betty, to share with me news of his recognition as the 2008 Kansas Small Business Person of the Year by the U.S. Small Business Administration. Gary is president and owner of Stanton County True Value Hardware in Johnson. In 2003, the town found itself facing the loss of one of its most needed and well established small businesses. The combination hardware store, lumberyard and farm implement dealership had been a fixture in the community for years and was scheduled to close until Gary decided to keep the store open.

Landon Beesley of Gove was in with his parents Phil and Paula, and siblings Tyrel, Charis, Elannah and Valerie of Gove. Landon was honored in a special ceremony this week for his re-enlistment into the military. House Minority Leader Dennis McKinney of Greensburg and State Representatives Eber Phelps of Hays, Doug Gatewood of Columbus and Jim Ward, along with his daughter Emily, of Wichita also stopped by to visit

Several Kansans stopped by my Washington, D.C., office this week for a tour of the United States Capitol building. Terry and Gloria Kelly and Holly Elwood of Hays, Pam Vignatelli of Overland Park, Larissa Beesley of Junction City, Chuck Stevenson of Oakley, Debbie Vignatelli of Topeka and Vickie and Christa Wilson of Overland Park were in for a tour.

Very truly yours,

Jerry