



Innovative Ag Services Hosts Senator Joni Ernst

Monticello, IA— August 24, 2017

Innovative Ag Services (IAS) was host to Senator Joni Ernst as part of her 99-county tour. She met with over a dozen Jones county representatives from various aspects of the community. Senator Ernst's tour is focusing on the Farm Bill. She said she is focusing on farm policies, food and nutrition.

Rick Vaughan, CEO of IAS, said in his industry as a farm supply cooperative, there are a lot of rules that have to be followed, making it hard for business.

"You get frustrated with rules and regulations," he said. "There seems to be a breath of fresh air with this last transition about some of those things."

Ernst offered, "If there are particular regulations that you think we need to go back and work on, I'm happy to do that."

Vaughan said one thing he'd like to see discussed and looked at in Washington concerns food prices.

"We have the cheapest food in the world and one reason we have the cheapest food in the world is self-sufficiency," said Vaughan. "I'd like to see more of a cost-sharing initiative/exercise to help us with some of the things we should be doing in production ag."

Darren Stadtmueller, a local farmer, asked Ernst if President Trump's infrastructure plan included funding to improve the locks and dams systems throughout Iowa.

Ernst said she is more hopeful now than she's been in the past that something will happen in terms of ag infrastructure improvements, especially with the President behind it. However, she said funding is a big issue.

"Unfortunately the funding stream there just barely maintains the structures that we have now," she explained. "But with the President's infrastructure push, I am hopeful and will be vocal about this as it moves through the process, that we can direct some of those dollars toward our locks and dams. That would be vitally important to those of us in the Midwest for those commodities."

Healthcare was also a major topic of discussion at IAS, with Ernst offering her thoughts on the Senate's defeat in trying to pass Repeal and Replace. She was not afraid to share her thoughts on the Affordable Care Act, saying she is not in favor of a single-pay insurance system.

"When people say they want to go to a single-payer system, I refer them to the VA. Look at our VA system right now," said Ernst. "When you have guys waiting three, four, five months to get appointments, and it is beyond that even to get actual procedures done. That's an issue."

Jerry Retzlaff of Monticello commented that he feels the federal government just needs to take itself out of the healthcare industry all together.

"It seems like our best healthcare was several years ago when the government wasn't regulating it," said Retzlaff. "We need to get the government back off that and let the insurance companies offer low-rate insurance plans."

Ernst said Congress tried that, but it failed. “We couldn’t get the votes. When you have folks that aren’t agreeable to getting government out of healthcare, we’re pretty well stuck with it for now. So what we have to do is figure out a way to put limitations on that, and finding folks across the aisle that will agree.”

Eric Briesemeister, CEO of Jones Regional Medical Center, addressed the need for regional hospitals like JRMC to provide quality health services to the people in rural communities.

“In the healthcare arena, the big thing I see is access to quality services,” he said. “Lots of people choose where they live and where they develop their business based on the healthcare that is available.”

Briesemeister said if people go to Cedar Rapids, for instance, to see a doctor, they’ll buy their prescriptions in Cedar Rapids, and maybe even get gas and shop in the city as well while they’re there.

“It’s vital we maintain these rural hospitals. It’s really really important,” commented Ernst. “We want our healthcare system to remain the best in the world. But at what cost? We need to lower the cost of healthcare, not just health insurance.”

Securing the southern U.S. border has been a hot topic lately in the national news. Both Sheriff Greg Graver and Monticello Police Chief Britt Smith said securing the border, in their minds, isn’t about illegal immigrants, but about keeping the dangerous drugs out of the U.S.

“All of the methamphetamine that we are seeing is ice being brought in from Mexico,” explained Graver. He said the quantity coming over the border and the potency is higher than the meth that is manufactured locally.

“The trifacta that we’re seeing is it’s about a third of the price, it’s more available than it’s ever been before, it has a better purity,” added Graver. “The state is trying to get the DEA involved because it’s literally coming from down on the border with Mexico. This is a huge epidemic.”

Ernst said she’s heard the same thing from other law enforcement agencies across Iowa. She said when the topic of securing the border comes up, she asks her constituents if they’re ok with drugs and sex/human trafficking coming over the boarder.

“It’s not just great people coming over the border who want a better life,” she said. “We have a lot of really bad illicit activities that are happening over our open border.”

Brooks, K. (2017, August 30). Sen. Ernst addresses healthcare, ag, border security. *Monticello Express*, p. A4.



Eric Briesemeister, CEO of JRMC, addressed Sen. Ernst on issues regarding providing quality healthcare in rural Iowa. Looking on are IAS CEO Rick Vaughan; Kathy Hutchinson, Sedona Staffing; Joel Althoff, ITS; and Dusty Embree, JCED.