

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0907

July 18, 2006

St. Johns County Residents
Florida's Seventh Congressional District

Dear Friends:

As your Representative in Congress, I wanted to provide a brief update on a number of St. Johns County projects in which I have been involved and that may be of interest to you.

While a great deal of my time in Washington has been expended on national issues, I continue to focus on helping to bring a better life and future opportunities to those whom I represent. Improving transportation and expanding good-paying jobs and economic opportunities in St. Johns County are some of my top priorities.

St. Johns ranks as one of the leading growth areas in Florida and our nation. To help meet this challenge, we are expanding our highway capacity and improving traffic safety in the northern part of St. Johns County. Work is underway to connect SR 9A to I-95 south of Jacksonville, which will help form a continuous beltway around the metropolitan area that will be designated I-295. A proposed new connector, the SR 9B Extension, would provide an alternative northeast route from the Race Track Road/I-95 junction, located east of Fruit Cove, to intersect the future I-295 just south of Baymeadows Road. SR 9A is currently under construction and funding for construction of SR 9B to I-95 has been committed. With federal support, preliminary design of the SR 9B Extension will begin in 2008.

With federal assistance obtained at the request of County and St. Augustine City officials, the Florida Department of Transportation will begin next year to purchase right of way to build a 9.3 mile throughway from S.R. 207 to S.R. 16 at an estimated cost of \$4.7 million. Formerly known as the S.R. 312 Extension/Bypass, this proposed road around St. Augustine has been re-designated S.R. 313 and should help relieve traffic in the congested downtown area. Preliminary design and engineering for the new road is now proceeding.

St. Johns County has made possible the four-laning of the Palm Valley Bridge where County Road 210 crosses over the Intracoastal Waterway, south of Jacksonville. Other sections of CR 210 have been widened to four lanes both east and west of US 1. To resolve significant

traffic congestion problems in that area, a new interchange is planned and will span the Florida East Coast Railroad and US 1. Federal approval has been obtained for acquiring right of way and to complete preliminary designing, now scheduled to begin in late 2008. We are working with local and State officials to secure the significant funds required for construction.

In St. Augustine, the new Visitor Information Center Parking Facility has now opened and accommodated nearly 9,000 cars in its initial opening week. I have been pleased to help City officials secure federal assistance for construction of this multi-mode transportation hub which will help address parking problems in the historic downtown area.

Getting around St. Johns County without a vehicle can be a problem. In conjunction with the St. Johns County Council on Aging, we are upgrading its Sunshine Bus and transit fleet and facilities. Based in St. Augustine, this community transportation provider recently became eligible to receive federal transit funds, and we have been able to return additional federal gas tax dollars to the program. We are also coordinating with area transit systems in Flagler and Putnam Counties as well as the Jacksonville Transportation Authority to provide better County-wide and regional service.

Additional projects and activities in St. Johns County and Northeast Florida have kept me busy during the past months.

To address the dramatic spike in murders in the Jacksonville area, I convened a meeting with federal, State and local law enforcement officials in June to discuss potential courses of action. Participants included officials from the U.S. Drug Czar's office, the North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and State and local officials. According to the FBI's 2006 Crime Report, Jacksonville from January to April experienced a 109% increase in homicides over the same period in 2005. Unfortunately, many of these murders are related to illegal drugs. We are carefully assessing and re-examining our federal efforts to ensure everything possible is done to resolve this serious problem.

To help combat teenage drug use, I have been pleased to aid EPIC Community Services, which focuses on our West Augustine youth by taking drugs off the streets and playgrounds and providing alternatives to illegal narcotics. We have been able to secure federal resources through The Drug-Free Communities Support Program, administered by the U.S. Drug Czar.

We have coordinated with St. Johns County and the West Augustine Community to secure federal designation of a Weed and Seed area in West Augustine, which has made the community eligible for federal funding and resources to combat illegal drug trafficking and crime. We are continuing our efforts to support the economic re-development of the area, expand affordable housing and improve stormwater drainage infrastructure in that area.

A dedication ceremony is planned in the near future for Bethune-Cookman's satellite campus in St. Johns County, which has been modernized with federal support secured last year. This past month, the House of Representatives granted additional funding for the Bethune-Cookman College School of Nursing Enhancement Project. The nursing industry is important to

our country's health care programs, and with a nationwide shortage of nurses, Bethune-Cookman will improve its education and training facilities in Central and Northeast Florida.

Over the past several years, one project that has been most rewarding for me to work on is the Castillo de San Marcos Visitors Center and fort rehabilitation and preservation. After enacting national legislation to provide federal authorization, efforts are now underway with the National Park Service and the City of St. Augustine to complete a final management and design plan for the Visitors Center and fort. Citizens are encouraged to contact the National Park Service at 1 South Castillo Dr, St. Augustine, FL 32084 to express their opinions through August 15th. The proposed design alternatives can be reviewed by visiting <http://parkplanning.nps.gov> – click on “Choose a Park” and select “Castillo de San Marcos National Monument” and then “Go”. Comments can be emailed to casa_gmp@nps.gov.

We are assisting the Town of Hastings with the restoration of its Old Civic Center, which was built in the 1930s as a Works Progress Administration initiative and has been abandoned for some time. Once completed, this facility will be available for use by volunteer charity organizations and for public community meetings.

Working together with Flagler College, we have obtained federal backing for preserving the former Hotel Ponce DeLeon in St. Augustine. Built in 1887 by Henry Flagler, the Ponce showcases Spanish Renaissance architecture and serves as the centerpiece of the College. This year we successfully acquired a National Historic Landmark designation for this important landmark.

It was my pleasure to recently host a large group of children from the rural areas of our Congressional District for a visit to the Guana-Tolomato-Matanzas Environmental Education Center. Some of these young people had never seen the ocean or participated in a marine education program. Seeing young eyes opened by an unfamiliar part of the world and this great facility fulfill its purpose was a special treat for everyone.

With the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' approval, beach restoration in St. Johns County will continue this summer. After repairing erosion from previous storms, hopefully and with good engineering, our shoreline can be better maintained in the future.

For some time, an area of Northwest St. Johns County with the zip code of 32259 has been designated as "Jacksonville" by the US Postal Service. In the past year, I assisted the St. Johns Chamber of Commerce and the St. Johns County Commission in their request for a new postal designation for the 22,000 people who now reside in this area. Beginning this month, the U.S. Postal Service's new designation for Northwest St. Johns County is "St. Johns, FL". We have also worked with the Postal Service to not change the last line designation of South Ponte Vedra Beach to St. Augustine, which will help to preserve the identity of this community. In another project, we are helping the City of St. Augustine and Flagler College to relocate the King Street postal facility to a new site.

In support of national security requirements, Congress has approved defense programs that will allow Northrop Grumman to maintain and possibly expand its production and workforce in St. Augustine.

St. Johns County is home to over 17,000 veterans, and it is important that we follow through on our commitment to assist those who served and sacrificed for our country. I recently visited our St. Johns County Veterans Outpatient Clinic that has increased services to our growing veterans population. Working with the Council on Aging, the VA Clinic is now operating bus service to the VA Hospital in Gainesville. The bus schedule is subject to change, so please call (904) 823-4800 and ask for VA Van Scheduling. Be sure to provide the date and time of your appointment to arrange for a pickup at the St. Augustine VA Clinic.

State approval has ensured that a new 120-bed nursing home will be built to greatly expand the capacity of veterans' care in Northeast Florida. This VA nursing home will be located on State Road 16, west of I-95 near the World Commerce Center – in close proximity to Flagler Hospital and also near several colleges and universities that offer degrees in a variety of medical professions. This new facility will help address the long term care needs of our growing and aging veterans population.

The VA nursing home will be operated by the State Veterans Homes Program and will be constructed in partnership with the U.S. Veterans Administration. Construction is expected to begin in Spring 2007. The State of Florida will provide 35% of the funding and the Federal Government 65%. I have committed to help secure funding and ensure that construction is completed as scheduled.

We are assisting seniors and veterans who need access to affordable prescription drugs. Prior to the May 15th deadline for enrollment in the new Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit, we contacted all seniors in the 7th Congressional District with information, conducted workshops and surveyed participants for their comments and suggestions. Seniors interested in the program who have not enrolled can still participate with a minor premium penalty. A new enrollment period will begin in November. Today a majority of those participating in the program have lowered their costs of medications and are pleased with their coverage. However, we must continue to bring down health care costs for all Americans.

This year's 7th Congressional District Art Contest for high school students was held at the Ponte Vedra Center For Arts. Young artists from St. Augustine, Allen D. Neese and Flagler Palm Coast High Schools participated. Judges included Dr. Gary Piazza of the Florida School of the Arts and local artists Jay Shoots and Art LaMay. This year's winners were hosted in Washington and their works of art are on display in the U.S. Capitol and in our Washington office.

We were pleased again this year to welcome to Washington several community leaders from St. Johns County who participated in our annual 7th Congressional District Fly-In. While in our nation's capital, participants received briefings by Congressional leaders and senior

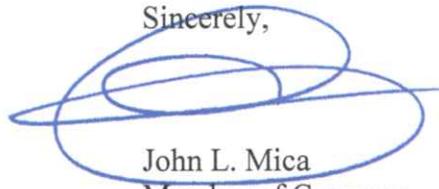
officials from the Administration. Special thanks to the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce and to all those who brought our community projects and priorities to the attention of federal officials.

While this brief update only touches on a few of the local projects in our community, I hope that you find it informative. Currently there are many important issues before Congress including immigration, tax reform, deficit spending, energy prices, national security and a host of matters vital to our future. Detailed information on my position and voting record relating to any of these national issues is available on the internet at www.house.gov/mica. You may also contact our St. Johns County 7th Congressional District Office at (904) 810-5048 for assistance or information.

Please know that your opinion and suggestions are always welcome, both on our local activities and national legislation. I hope you will not hesitate to contact me on matters concerning our community or issues pending before Congress.

With my regards and best wishes, I remain

Sincerely,



John L. Mica
Member of Congress