



Week of February 28, 2005

Enabling Operations

JEFFERSON CITY – Many of us get satisfaction with our lives from our families, friends and social life. Being employed is also important for reasons beyond the obvious monetary gain. A job provides us with pride, independence and valuable interactive experience with our social peers. Sheltered workshops have been established in Missouri to offer jobs to those who are disabled so they, too, can earn money for themselves and feel the same self-worth as those who are not disabled.

Sheltered workshops are non-profit small businesses employing people who are not able to work in a competitive work environment due to physical or mental disabilities, such as mental retardation, head injuries or blindness. Disabled workers are contracted to other companies to perform various tasks such as packaging and assembling products, sorting and stuffing mail, and cleaning and maintaining grounds or facilities. Workshop employees are paid based on their ability to perform in comparison to the performance of a person without a disability. For example, if an employee takes two hours to produce what a non-disabled person would produce in one hour at a \$7-an-hour job, he or she would be paid half of what the hourly wage is; in this case, the hourly rate would be \$3.50.

As with any company, it is expensive to keep the business up and running, let alone being able to sufficiently fund the payroll. For Missouri's sheltered workshops, these costs are even more taxing on the operating budget because the workshops function by predominately relying on the revenue from contracted work. Even though an individual in the aforementioned scenario would get paid \$3.50 an hour, the cost for the same amount of

the work is still \$7. Increased supervision is also needed in sheltered workshops, which adds to the climbing overhead costs.

A bill that would gradually increase the amount of state subsidies to sheltered workshops is nearing final passage in the Missouri Senate. Currently, workshops are reimbursed at a rate of \$13 per 6-hour or longer day worked by disabled workers. Senate Bill 173 increases the payments each year, so that by July of 2008, the reimbursement formula's base rate will be \$18.

In Missouri, there are 93 sheltered workshops, which employ nearly 8,000 disabled people and close to 900 non-disabled individuals. These workshops play a significant role in their area's commerce and deserve to be adequately reimbursed for their contributions to the disabled community and to the state of Missouri. The workshop employees are proud to be wage earners because their jobs give them confidence and self-satisfaction as they actively contribute to Missouri's economy. My colleagues and I in the Senate and House are working to ensure the operations of these workshops that employ these hardworking citizens are not hindered by insufficient funding.

*Sen. Larry Gene Taylor represents the people of Ozark, Stone,
Taney, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald counties.*