



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Sheltered Workshops

JEFFERSON CITY – Each year Missouri lawmakers submit hundreds of proposals in the hope their ideas will be debated and approved by their colleagues. The reality is that relatively few proposals will win committee approval and be sent to the floor for debate by the full House or Senate. That's simply the nature of the legislative process.

For example, for the past two years I have sponsored legislation to gradually increase payments to sheltered workshops. Although the bill was approved in committee each year and sent to the floor for full debate, time ran out in the session before the bill could be called up for discussion.

Sheltered workshops are non-profit small businesses employing people who are deemed to be unable to work in a competitive work environment due to mental retardation, head injuries, blindness, deafness and other physical or mental disabilities. Some of the tasks that disabled people are contracted to perform include packaging and assembling products, sorting and stuffing mail, janitorial duties and grounds maintenance.

As with many businesses, operating costs are high. However, for Missouri's sheltered workshops, the strain of these costs is even more cumbersome, because unlike those in many other states, they operate by mostly relying on contracted work and the revenue that work generates. Increased supervision also is needed, which adds to the overhead costs. Many sheltered workshops receive local tax support through special boards.

As of now, workshops are reimbursed at a rate of \$13, multiplied by the number of 6-hour or longer days worked by disabled workers.

I will reintroduce legislation next year to increase the reimbursements each year, so that by July of 2009, workshops will be receiving up to \$18 for every 6-hour or longer day worked by its disabled employees, subject to appropriation.

Missouri's 93 well-run sheltered workshops, which employ nearly 8,000 disabled people and close to 900 non-disabled individuals, greatly contribute to the state's commerce and to communities' well-being. My bill would help ensure the positive effects of sheltered workshops will continue.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.