

*State
Senator* **John**
Griesheimer
Capitol Report
2007



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From the desk of

State Senator John Griesheimer



Dear Friends,

The 2007 legislative session was a very productive one for our district as I was able to advance six of my own senate bills — the most of any senator — as well as several house bills.

I was privileged to once again chair the Senate Economic Development, Tourism and Local Government Committee, and I served on numerous other committees and joint committees. I'm also a board member on the OATS, Inc. public transit system.

We passed some real priorities for everyone including a measure to ensure more cable TV competition and legislation making processes easier for vehicle and home owners.

Meanwhile, we significantly increased the amount of state money going to school districts in our area, found more funds for colleges and universities, and approved programs to help our economy. All this... and we approved a tax cut for senior citizens and set aside money in case future revenues don't meet projections.

Please look through this legislative report to read more about these issues. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me or my office.

Sincerely,

How to Contact Sen. Griesheimer

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Capitol Office Staff

One of a senator's most important assets is a dependable and friendly staff. I am fortunate to have both Carolyn Case and Chris Sutherland to assist me in my office in Jefferson City.



Feel free to contact them if you have questions about the Missouri Legislature, concerns about how the laws affect you, or simply want to book a tour of the Capitol for your family or group.

Video Franchise Agreements

Making Sure Consumers have Options

For two years, Senator Griesheimer has worked on a bill that allows statewide video service franchise agreements. This year, he was finally successful with the passing and signing of Senate Bill 284.

The new law will promote lower prices and expanded options by creating more competition for Missouri cable consumers. It will streamline the process for new cable providers to enter Missouri markets. Currently, cable companies have to work with each individual municipality if they want to bring service to an area. Senate Bill 284 simplifies things by allowing companies to work directly with the Missouri Public Service Commission to enter several markets simultaneously. This levels the playing field between traditional cable companies and telephone companies looking to get into the cable TV market.

Sen. Griesheimer has long contended that this bill would be an economic boon for this state, and those efforts seem already to be paying off. The largest telecommunications provider in Missouri that serves two-thirds of the 26th District says it is going to spend \$335 million in upgrades to its systems

in Missouri so it will be ready to offer video services. The senator points out his bill also requires that same major telephone company to commit to providing video service to 25 percent of its households within three years.



Some had argued early on in the bill process that there were few protections for consumers under this measure. Sen. Griesheimer, long known for his bipartisan approach to legislation, worked closely with members from both sides of the political aisle to craft a package that moves forward on video franchise agreements while protecting consumers' rights.

Registering Your Vehicle

Saving You from Auto Repair Hassles and Ending Dealer Plate Fraud

Last year, Sen. Griesheimer was able to eliminate some of the “exhausting” hassles of emissions testing. Those new rules go in effect on September 1, 2007. This year, he was able to get passed into law another measure addressing the registration of vehicles. Senate Bill 82, which he sponsored, gets a better handle on what is truly a salvage vehicle.

In 2004, the legislature made changes to the salvage law that has caused a lot of confusion and frustration for consumers, body shops, and insurance companies alike by placing a threshold on the amount that a vehicle is considered “totaled” when damaged. Insurance companies, worried that hidden damage might push the repair amount over the “totaled” threshold after they had already paid to repair the vehicle and then have to pay twice to “total” the vehicle for the same damage, were holding back approving claims. That stopped business for body shops and for consumers just wanting to get their vehicles back on the road again. Also, some consumers were forced to need-



lessly purchase another vehicle when they couldn't afford it due to the insurance company's unwillingness to repair the vehicle due to the confusion from the change in the law. Sen. Griesheimer's bill changed the formula for “totaling” to 80 percent of the vehicle's value.

Additionally, a salvage title will no longer be required for a vehicle “totaled” solely by cosmetic hail damage, which would make the vehicle all but worthless later on if the vehicle owner decides to keep driving it.

Another important part of the new law addressed the issue of dealer license plate fraud. Last year, there were 1,100 “car dealers” who never sold a single vehicle in this state, but they had 13,000 dealer license plates. Sen Griesheimer moved to shut down what he saw was an obvious fraud. Now, the number of dealer license plates a dealer will receive will be proportional to the number of vehicles that dealer sells in the previous year.

Improving Missouri's Economy & Bridges

This year, lawmakers came back into special session to address a couple of priorities important to Sen. Griesheimer: the economic development bill and a provision to speed up the Missouri Department of Transportation's Safe & Sound Bridge Program. Here is what came out of those two weeks:

Land Tax Credits

The Distressed Areas Land Assemblage Tax Credit will grant tax credits of 50 percent of the cost and 100 percent of the interest incurred getting eligible land. Eligible land will be a parcel consisting of at least 75 acres that was truly blighted and ripe for new businesses to come in and make that land a new, economic boon for the area. Credits would be capped at \$10 million for each project, and the total cap for the entire program would be \$95 million. The act would make the credits available through mid-2013.

The new economic development bill addresses the issue of Tax Increment Financing (TIF), especially for Franklin and St. Louis counties. Greenfield areas, such as a corn field, can't be annexed and then declared blighted. The land would have to be annexed for at least 10 years.

Quality Jobs Program

The new economic development bill will raise the cap on tax credits for the Quality Jobs Program from \$12 million to \$40 million.

The Quality Jobs Program is an initiative that has helped create 94,000 jobs in Missouri since its inception in 2005. The types of projects eligible to receive benefits will be expanded to include more small businesses with fewer than 100 employees and credits for flood survivor relief.

There are some accountability measures as well, such as making sure companies don't double-dip on state and federal benefits for disasters like flooding AND try to get the Quality Jobs benefits. Any delinquent taxes would have to be paid before these credits would be issued.

New Market - Qualified Equity Investment Tax Credits

The New Market - Qualified Equity Investment Tax Credit will encourage economic growth by giving a tax credit for a percentage of the adjusted purchase price for qualified equity investments. This will encourage new business growth by giving those who invest into truly needy, low-income businesses, in urban and rural areas, a break on their taxes. The program will be capped at \$15 million a year.

Helping Small Business and Agricultural Interests in Missouri

In addition to the New Market Tax Credits helping rural businesses, farmers and livestock producers will enjoy a surge in economic investments in their ventures as the economic development bill has a tax credit for beef producers. The creation and funding of \$3 million in Qualified Beef Tax Credits will encourage Missouri cattle producers to keep and finish their feeder calves in the state — saving an estimated \$600 million in economic activity that is lost because those calves are sold to operations in other states.



Sen. Griesheimer worked with colleagues such as Sen. Rob Mayer (right) to craft the economic development bill

Building Bridges

The special session also included a measure that will give the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission authorization to use a "design-build-finance-maintain" method for its Safe & Sound Bridge Program to get more than 800 of Missouri's worst bridges in good condition and keep them that way for 25 years. The provisions passed allow the commission to change some bonding issues to finance the project. This will give the state the chance to fix a large number of bridges all at once, so it doesn't continue to fall further and further behind on this important infrastructure.



Organizing Common Sewer Districts

Parts of Senate Bill 22 have been works in progress over the last six years. This past session Sen. Griesheimer was able to help pass into law this omnibus measure that addresses numerous provisions important to cities, counties, and fire, water, sewer, and ambulance districts.

The first important provision of SB 22 streamlines the process for establishing new or re-organized common sewer districts. Groups wanting to form one of these districts now can go directly to a county commission to get permission, instead of the lengthy legal process they previously had to go through. Reorganized sewer districts may also establish sanitary

sewer improvement areas and impose assessments and user fees on the property benefiting the improvement project.

Incorporation of the new districts would come upon two-thirds approval of the voters, or in the case the petitioners don't have the authority to issue general obligation bonds, a simple majority would do. Land owners contiguous or reasonably close to a re-organized district could petition to become part of that district.

Sen. Griesheimer says the bottom line is homeowners will find it easier to join common sewer districts that will improve the services to their homes.

Tax Shield on Retirement Benefits

House Bill 444 phases out taxation on Social Security benefits, Social Security disability payments, and certain non-private retirement benefits in order to make it easier for seniors who depend on fixed incomes.

The bill gradually phases in an income tax exemption beginning with 20 percent for the 2007 tax year, eventually becoming a complete 100 percent exemption by the 2012 tax year. Seniors 62 and over and all disabled residents will be eligible for the exemptions. An income threshold of \$85,000 for an individual or \$100,000 for a married couple applies.

Qualifying non-private retirement benefits include plans for firefighters and police officers, railroad workers, teachers, as well as veterans and certain federal employees. These pensions will also be exempt

from state taxes up to the maximum Social Security benefit (currently \$32,500) by 2012.

Pacific Senior Center Gets \$50K

The newly-opened Pacific Senior Center got a \$50,000 infusion of some much-needed funds, thanks to the work of Sen. Griesheimer. He was able to help secure the money for the center that offers senior citizens a hot meal and a warm smile.

The Pacific facility opened in April after having lost its community senior center several years ago. Right now, it's operating on donations from the community, but officials hope they can get on a regular allotment.

Tourism

Sen. Griesheimer serves as the chairman of the Senate Economic Development, Tourism and Local Government Committee. He is proud to have helped pass several measures important to Missouri's tourism economy.

Senate Bill 376, which he sponsored, continues the Division of Tourism Supplemental Revenue Fund through the summer of 2015. This year, lawmakers were able to increase the general revenue transfer into the fund to nearly \$3 million.

Tourism is a major economic engine for the state. A study by the University of Missouri shows that tourism has a \$13-billion-a-year impact in the state with more than 21 million households visiting Missouri a year. Missouri tourism officials say that for every dollar Missouri spends on marketing tourism,

more than \$52 is returned in tourism expenditures. In FY 2006, tourism generated \$382 million in state sales taxes, plus even more collected on the local level. Nearly 300,000 Missourians are employed in tourism-related industries.

Senate Bill 81 gives the City of Sullivan, upon voter approval, the right to charge a hotel/motel guest tax.

Snow Days
Part of SB 376 made sure kids got all the summer vacation they deserved! After ice storms in January shut down some schools for more than a week, Sen. Griesheimer fought to make sure those days would not have to be made up this summer.

The Missouri Miracle

In October of 2002, then 11-year-old Shawn Hornbeck disappeared without a trace while riding his bicycle in the Eastern Missouri community of Richwoods. For more than four long years, his family and authorities would search in vain, chasing lead after lead, only finding dead ends. In January of 2007, the area would be shocked again when 13-year-old Ben Ownby also disappeared without a trace from his Beaufort neighborhood. But that would actually be the turning point for both of the boys' fates.

Sixteen-year-old Mitchell Hults, an older classmate of Ownby, noticed a white Nissan pickup truck speeding away from the area. His alertness that something might be wrong



Franklin Co. Sheriff Gary Toelke with Gov. Blunt, Chief Deputy Michael Copeland, and Capt. Don Jones being recognized for their part in the Missouri Miracle



Mitchell Hults is recognized on the floor of the Missouri Senate for his part in the return of Shawn Hornbeck and Ben Ownby

and his ability to accurately describe the vehicle driven led police to apprehend a suspect in Ownby's abduction... and led them to the same man accused of holding Shawn Hornbeck for four-and-a-half years.

Hornbeck's and Ownby's reunification with their families was dubbed "The Missouri Miracle" by the press throughout the world, and Mitchell Hults was rightly recognized for his keen eye and insightful thought to make sure authorities knew what he had seen. For his part, Hults was honored by the legislature and the governor for Mitchell's role in making the Missouri Miracle happen.

2007 Gubernatorial Appointments

The governor makes appointments to departments, state boards and commissions with the advice and consent of the Senate. Each appointment is sponsored by the nominee's senator, with whom he or she appears before the appointments committee. It is an honor to have citizens from the area serve the state in various capacities, and Sen. Griesheimer considers it a privilege to sponsor their nominations.



*Michael D. King,
Missouri Citizen's
Commission on
Compensation for
Elected Officials*



*Guenter Goldsmith,
Holocaust Education
and Awareness
Commission*



*Melvin C. DeClue,
Seismic Safety
Commission*

Re-Appointed:

Thomas Irwin,
St. Louis Regional Convention And
Sports Complex Authority
Gerald F. Engemann,
Dam and Reservoir Safety Council
James A. Marchack,
Elevator Safety Board

Other Bills Sponsored/Handled by Sen. Griesheimer



*Sen. Griesheimer is known for his
bipartisan work in the Senate. Here
he confers with Senate minority party
member Sen. Harry Kennedy.*

.....**SB 81** – Allows the City of Sullivan, upon voter approval, to charge a hotel/motel guest tax.

.....**SB 166** – Deals with promotional devices or programs to advertise or sell a timeshare period, plan, or property.

.....**HB 619** – Specifies when the Civil Air Patrol can be activated.

.....**HB 459** – Requires land transfers to be filed with the county assessor.

.....**HB 327** – Omnibus economic development bill. (*vetoed*)

Missouri Money

Each year, the General Assembly must determine how to budget taxpayer money for the next fiscal year. This session, the legislature passed a \$21.5 billion spending plan that reflects responsible financial planning.

Money for the 26th District

Funding for public schools in the 26th Senate District increased to \$162,658,765

A 4-5 percent increase in money for colleges and universities PLUS the infusion of Lewis & Clark Discovery Initiative dollars - \$2 million for East Central College

Missouri Eastern Correctional Center - \$9.5 million in operating budget funds and nearly \$1.5 million for capital improvements

State parks in the 26th District receive nearly \$1.4 million

Meramec SP	\$606,739
Babler Memorial SP	\$499,780
Castlewood SP	\$178,978
Robertsville SP	\$106,258

Pacific Senior Center - \$50,000



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