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Your Highway Patrol — Enforcing Our Laws and Keeping You Safe

This week, as we continue on with our series featuring various state agencies whose mission directly affects the citizens of eastern Jackson County, I'd like to highlight the work of one of our most important agencies — the Missouri State Highway Patrol (MSHP). The MSHP (like the State Emergency Management Agency, which was featured last week) is part of the Missouri Department of Public Safety (DPS). This department also includes the Missouri National Guard, the Missouri State Water Patrol, Missouri Homeland Security, as well as several other divisions. The efforts of the brave men and women in DPS and in the Highway Patrol make sure our laws are enforced and that citizens are kept safe.

Since it began back in 1931, the Missouri Highway Patrol has grown from a contingent of 55 officers and a handful of civilians charged with enforcing the traffic laws of the state to a fully-accredited law enforcement agency of about 2,500 uniformed members, civilians, and support staff. These law enforcement professionals not only enforce the rules of the road for Missouri's approximately 33,000 miles of state-maintained highways but also conduct criminal investigations, law enforcement training, driver's license examinations, and oversee the regulation of the commercial vehicle and gaming industries across the state.

First and foremost, the Highway Patrol enforces the traffic laws of the state and the works to reduce the number of fatalities and injuries out on the road. Stopping aggressive and drunk drivers is a major priority for the patrol. More than 250 people die every year on Missouri's roads because of drunk drivers.

In addition to enforcing traffic laws, troopers are also trained to be on the lookout for other criminal activity. The patrol is committed to enforcing our state's criminal laws and is an important part of the team made up of various federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies that protect citizens seven days a week from all sorts of crime.

In recent weeks, the governor has given the Highway Patrol (as well as the Water Patrol and Capitol Police) a new mission. This mission involves checking the immigration status of those suspected of being in this country illegally. Once an arrest is made, the patrol will verify the arrestee's legal status to make sure the suspect is not illegally in the country. This effort will go a long way in doing what the federal government has been hesitant to do: enforce the immigration laws of the country.

The Highway Patrol also serves as a vital link in the nation's efforts to step up homeland security. It is the Highway Patrol's responsibility to help safeguard the Show-Me state from all manner of threats. As part of this effort, the patrol helps operate the Missouri Information Analysis Center (MIAC) which is our state's information fusion center. All public safety information and intelligence is monitored and disseminated to the proper agencies and personnel from the MIAC all day, every day, to make sure that important information is shared among law enforcement agencies. It is this kind of cooperation that was lacking in the United States prior to 9/11, and making sure that all pieces of the puzzle are shared could thwart the next attack.

For more than 75 years, your Missouri Highway Patrol has served and protected the citizens of our state. Their mission continues to evolve as our world changes, and I'm confident that these brave professionals will continue to serve our state well as they meet each new challenge with skill and dedication.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.