



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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18<sup>th</sup> Senate District

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**A Weekly Column for the  
Week of January 15, 2007**

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# Utility Rates and Rural Health Care

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JEFFERSON CITY – I recently attended a public hearing in Mexico sponsored by the Missouri Public Service Commission regarding Ameren UE's proposed rate increase. In July, the utility company filed an electric rate case with the Public Service Commission to increase its revenues by \$360 million, which amounts to an extra six dollars a month for the average customer.

I was encouraged by the ability of the public to put their concerns before the commission. I also was very impressed by the commission's use of technology in setting up a teleconference between the Mexico Advanced Technology Center, Moberly Area Community College and Jefferson City. This certainly gives individuals greater access to their government and that can only be good.

Residents who were unable to attend the local public hearing and want to make written comments may contact the Office of the Public Counsel, P.O. Box 2230, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102, telephone (573) 751-4857, e-mail [opcservice@ded.mo.gov](mailto:opcservice@ded.mo.gov) or the Missouri Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 360, Jefferson City, Missouri 65102, telephone 800-392-4211, e-mail [pscinfo@psc.mo.gov](mailto:pscinfo@psc.mo.gov).

This week our office hosted an important gathering at the state capital to discuss the state of health care in rural Missouri. I was joined by all state representatives in the 18<sup>th</sup> Senatorial District, as well as rural physicians, advanced practice nurses and others involved in rural health care to discuss the problems facing rural health. I was pleased and gratified that the full delegation of representatives, both Democratic and Republican, understand we have some real challenges to meet to make rural health care accessible and affordable for all Missourians.

Too many rural residents have to travel miles just to receive basic health care, and that travel time can be the difference between life and death in an emergency. We must find ways to attract and retain qualified health care professionals in our small towns and cities.

Innovative solutions such as the Northeast Missouri Rural Health Network are helping to increase access to health care services for rural residents in the region. Since its inception in 1998, the NMRHN has grown to 49 member agencies consisting of five rural hospitals, eleven county health departments, eleven ambulance districts, an air ambulance service, two medical education agencies, four mental health providers, a federally qualified health center, four nursing homes, hospice, pregnancy resource center, domestic violence center, home health agency, medical clinic, independent physicians association, planned parenthood, association for handicapped citizens and an independent living center.

This year I am sponsoring Senate Bill 113, which would require health carriers to include durable medical equipment providers within their service provider networks, if they have a main office in a community with a population of 25,000 or fewer. Missourians should not have to pay the full out-of-pocket expense for the medical equipment they need, from wheelchairs to oxygen tanks to nebulizers. Many simply do without, jeopardizing their chances for recovery and impeding their ability to live healthy lives.

My office has welcomed numerous visitors during the first couple of weeks of session, and I encourage anyone to stop by for a chat when they are visiting our Capitol. My office is located on the fourth floor of the Capitol, Room 434. Please stop by when you are in Jefferson City.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-7852.