



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Free and Fair Discussion

JEFFERSON CITY – Etched on the walls of the Senate chamber between portraits of Daniel Boone and Thomas Jefferson are these words, “Free and Fair Discussion Will Ever Be the Firmest Friend of Truth.” It’s one of the hallmarks of the upper chamber – the ability of a member to speak on a subject without the kind of artificial time limits that often ends debate in the House.

This week the Missouri Senate began debating the governor’s latest proposal to sell \$350 million in assets from the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority (MOHELA). This plan was originally designed to make Missouri a leader in the life sciences industry, but in order to appease certain special interest groups, all of the projects dealing with life sciences research have been deleted. However, that’s not my main objection to this constantly-evolving proposal.

There is no guarantee that all of the campus construction projects funded under this plan would receive the money they are being promised. I don’t want this to turn into another 15-year highway plan in which communities across the state were promised new roads, only to be disappointed when the money ran out. That fiasco gave the Missouri Department of Transportation a big black eye, and it took the department several years to regain the trust of the citizens of the state.

I got to participate in my first filibuster this week, and I’m sure it surprised people who know me that I’m able to stand and talk for long periods of time. The filibuster is a tool the minority party uses when seeking concessions on a bill.

We took shifts during the filibuster to give everyone a chance to voice their opinions on the MOHELA bill, but in the end we could not work out an agreement that satisfied everybody. I plan to continue discussing this legislation with my colleagues during the Spring Recess.

I had the pleasure of inviting my father to testify in favor of an amendment to a bill dealing with the regulation of motor vehicles. My amendment would exempt utility vehicles like the one my Dad uses on the farm from having to be titled and registered. Utility vehicles are typically used in farming, lawn care, landscaping services or as maintenance vehicles and are generally used off-road. My amendment gives cities or counties the ability to issue special permits if someone needs to operate a utility vehicle on a highway or county road.

The Senate Health and Mental Health Committee took up my bill to restore the cuts made to Medicaid two years ago. Those cuts left thousands of Missourians with no healthcare and eliminated healthcare services to thousands more. The chairman of the committee said he supported my bill but did not think the state had the money to restore the Medicaid services cut in 2005.

My colleagues in the Senate this week did approve a bill I'm sponsoring which gives counties the authority to levy a small tax to pay for the upkeep and maintenance of cemeteries within the county. SB 345 allows counties to levy a property tax of no more than one half cent per one hundred dollars assessed valuation on all taxable property in the county. The money would be placed in a County Cemetery Maintenance Fund to help maintain small cemeteries, many of which have been neglected over the years. These small cemeteries are the final resting places of our ancestors, our veterans, and our historical figures. We need to make sure counties have the ability to restore and maintain the dignity of these sacred places.

We welcomed a lot of visitors to our office in the Capitol this week, including members of the Kirksville Leadership Institute and the Kirksville Youth Leadership Institute.

It's been a long week at the Capitol with several late night sessions and I'm looking forward to spending a week on the farm getting everything ready for spring planting.

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