



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

Wes Shoemyer  
18<sup>th</sup> Senate District

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 434  
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Weekly Column for the  
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**Contact: Kathy Armstrong  
(573) 751-7852**

# Alternative Fuels, Mo HealthNet

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JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate this week gave initial approval to a bill that has the potential to help our soybean farmers in much the same way the ethanol mandate approved last year is helping our corn farmers. Senate Bill 204 will require all diesel fuel sold in the state after April 1, 2009 to be a biodiesel-blended fuel, unless the cost of the blended fuel exceeds the cost of conventional diesel fuel.

Under the bill, fuel terminals in Missouri that sell diesel fuel will sell a five-percent blend. This bill has the potential to help us reduce our dependence on foreign sources of oil, while also reducing air pollution since biodiesel burns cleaner than conventional diesel fuel. Biodiesel-blended fuel also has a higher lubricity, meaning less wear and tear on engines.

Right now, state law requires state fleets to operate on a 20-percent biodiesel-blend, even if the biodiesel-blended fuel is up to 25-cents more per gallon than traditional diesel fuel. I successfully amended SB 204 to bring state fleets in line with the rest of the state. Under my amendment, if biodiesel-blended fuel costs more than conventional diesel fuel, state fleet operators can use the lower-cost fuel. With the growth in biodiesel production and with new biodiesel plants scheduled to come on line soon, the state mandate is outdated. Biodiesel is now at the point where it can compete fairly in the marketplace.

I also amended a bill that offers tax credits to Missourians who plan to buy hybrid vehicles or who fill their tanks with E-85 gasoline. Senate Bill 40 offers a number of tax credits designed to stimulate the growth of alternative-fueled vehicles and the construction of alternative fueling stations.

At the moment it's fairly difficult to find a gas station in Missouri that offers E-85 gasoline. And since we're requiring most gasoline sold in Missouri to be ethanol-blended, it only makes sense to offer people incentives to buy vehicles that run on alternative fuels. However, some people may want the benefits of using ethanol-blended fuels without having to buy a new vehicle. Most vehicles built since 1992 can be converted to flex-fuel vehicles, so I offered an amendment to SB 40 that provides a 25% tax credit for the purchase of EPA-approved flex-fuel conversion kits. My amendment was included in the legislation, which won first-round approval in the Senate this week.

I've talked a lot about Senate Bill 577 over the past few weeks – the bill that would replace the current state Medicaid program with Mo HealthNet. It's not a perfect bill since it does nothing for the tens of thousands of Missourians who lost health care services two years ago. I supported an amendment that would have restored health care for the vulnerable citizens who lost it two years ago, but the amendment failed by a couple of votes.

However, the Premium Offset Program in the bill will help working Missourians who cannot afford to purchase their employer-sponsored health care plans. Individuals who earn up to 185% of the federal poverty level will be eligible for health care under the Premium Offset Program. It's estimated that more than 100,000 Missourians will gain access to health care through their employers under this provision.

The Long -Term Care Partnership Program included in SB 577 is another good feature that will help older Missourians stay in their homes longer. The goal of the Long-Term Care Partnership Program is to ensure Missourians don't have to sell most or all of their assets just to qualify for health care coverage.

I supported the final vote on SB 577 this week in the hopes that members of the House will fix some of the mistakes we could not fix in the Senate version. There's no reason we cannot restore health care to the thousands of vulnerable citizens who lost their health care two years ago.

We visited with a lot of folks at our capital office this week, including a group of fourth-grade students from Shelbina.

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