



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Ringling in the New Year

JEFFERSON CITY – The end of the year offers us the opportunity to reflect on the events of the past 12 months and how they have affected our lives. At the same time, we look forward to a new year full of hopes and ambitions. The holidays and New Year remind us of the qualities that are so important to all of us – those of faith, humility and goodwill to our neighbors.

Writing the last legislative report of 2007 brings to mind many good memories of my first year as your state senator. Missouri lawmakers accomplished a number of programs to help the citizens of Missouri during the first half of the 94th General Assembly.

We began to transform our state healthcare system, shifting the focus from sickness and treatment to wellness and prevention. The new MO HealthNet program that replaces the old Medicaid system takes some steps in the right direction. For example, it provides incentives for people to buy long-term care insurance that protects their assets. The bill also provides incentives for people to show up to the doctor on time for checkups. It also encourages people to improve their health by quitting smoking or getting more exercise. But the measure does nothing to restore healthcare services for the poor and the disabled who lost their healthcare services when majority Republicans slashed Medicaid in 2005. The bill mostly deals with the process of delivering healthcare services, rather than fixing the problems with our current healthcare system.

The legislature also gave citizens the right to protect themselves in their homes and cars, increased payments to sheltered workshops, and continued our commitment to investing in public education.

On the other hand, some of our greatest successes in 2007 were stopping bad ideas from becoming law. For example, we managed to stop a bill that would have taken away the

ability of local governments to pass ordinances to protect the health of the citizens. Government works best at the local level because our state is so varied geologically and geographically. County commissioners keep those differences in mind when passing local ordinances. Also, county commissioners are much more willing and able to work with people on variances to the ordinances. To regulate from the state or federal level would hinder a person's ability to work with government to get what they want.

We tried but ultimately failed to stop the governor's misguided plan to sell off MOHELA's assets to pay for new buildings on college campuses. MOHELA was created by lawmakers to provide low-interest loans to Missouri students to help them go to college, and I'm afraid this measure will reduce opportunities for students to continue their education.

Since 2008 is an election year, I don't anticipate having to deal with a lot of controversial measures during the legislative session, but we'll keep our guard up to make sure lawmakers do what's in the best interest of all Missouri citizens. In addition to putting together a state budget, we'll probably tackle immigration and property taxes in the 2008 session.

I want to wish a Happy New Year to everyone in the 18th Senate District. Topping my list of resolutions is the promise to serve you to the best of my ability as I return to Jefferson City for a new legislative session. I hope that 2008 brings you and your loved ones all of the blessings that you hope for.

If you have any questions or comments about this or any other issue, give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an email at wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov, or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 West Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.