



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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Legislation Benefits Teachers and State Parks

JEFFERSON CITY — Lawmakers continued presenting their legislation to Senate committees this week, and I would like to point out two that I introduced to my colleagues. One of the measures extends sunsets on retirement benefits for public school teachers, and the other offers the potential for even greater resources for our beloved state parks. These bills will provide opportunities for Missouri educators and those who enjoy the outdoors.

Senate Bill 244 continues important retirement options for our hardworking teachers and school employees. The legislation extends the termination date for two retirement plans from July 1, 2008, to July 1, 2013. One of the retirement options, known as “25 and out,” allows teachers and school employees to retire if they are under 55 and have worked in public schools between 25 and 30 years. The other plan provides annual benefits for those with 31 or more years of service. Under that plan, retirees receive annual benefits of 2.55 percent of their final average salary times their years of service.

These vital plans allow Missouri educators to retire with a sense of peace and security. By extending these benefits packages into the next decade, we will continue to provide needed retirement options for those who have invested so much of themselves in educating our children.

This week I also introduced legislation that will provide new opportunities for the state and non-profit organizations to work together for the benefit of Missouri’s valued state parks. Currently, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources can enter cooperative agreements with non-profits to provide cooperative, interpretive or educational services to state parks. SB 198 adds facility enhancement to the list of activities permitted under cooperative agreements.

The legislation requires non-profit organizations to submit documentation outlining how the state will benefit from facility enhancements, and they must reimburse the Department of Natural Resources for the costs of park facility space and staff support. Additionally, proceeds from the sale of any services provided through the cooperative agreement must be used for interpretive or educational services in state parks.

These proposals continue Missouri's efforts to provide for hardworking educators and expand on the success of our state parks. I will work hard to see these measures through the Legislature and on to the governor's desk.

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Also this week I met with several Bootheel residents working to improve economic conditions and job opportunities in our region. I spoke with Steve McPheeters, who works for Noranda Aluminum and is chair of the Southeast Missouri Economic Development Alliance (SMEDA); Emily Modlin of Missouri Workforce Development in Kennett; and Scott Sattler, who is the manager of the Workforce Investment Board of Southeast Missouri, based in Cape Girardeau.

Each of these individuals is working hard to invigorate the Bootheel economy. We addressed the need for a strategic plan that unifies the private and public sectors to address the shifting job market. Additionally, we discussed how tax credits for small businesses and workforce development and training programs can help keep Southeast Missouri businesses and workers competitive in the changing economy. These are just a handful of ideas to improve the lives of the hardworking men and women of the Bootheel, and I will continue working on this important issue.

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Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.