



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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Senators Debate Bills Affecting Labor, Agriculture and Public Safety

JEFFERSON CITY — Lawmakers recently adjourned for spring recess after a busy week addressing several important issues. My legislation improving labor laws to save taxpayer dollars and improve local services was the first Senate bill to pass the Legislature. Meanwhile, the Senate agriculture committee this week approved my bill protecting rice farmers from genetically modified organisms, or GMOs, and I introduced legislation supporting law enforcement.

Senate Bill 339, which implements the Fairness in Public Construction Act, is now on its way to the governor. This legislation prohibits state and local governments from requiring potential contractors to enter into agreements with labor organizations in order to win construction contracts. Current law states that governments can require “project labor agreements,” or PLAs, under which public agencies promise union working conditions for contractors in exchange for a pledge that workers will not bargain for higher wages.

Union-only PLAs reduce competition for public projects, driving up costs at the expense of taxpayers. They also discriminate against the four out of five construction workers in the United States who choose not to be represented by unions. Workers should have a right to make their own decisions about whether or not to join a union, and governments should do all they can to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. There is no question why this common-sense legislation is the first Senate bill this year on its way to the governor.

Another of my bills advanced this week, Senate Bill 387, has been approved by the Agriculture, Conservation, Parks and Natural Resources Committee. This legislation establishes the Missouri Rice Certification Act to help keep commercial rice from being contaminated by GMOs.

The Missouri Rice Certification Act regulates the production, transporting and handling of certain rice varieties. Under SB 387, a rice certification committee will review existing rice-identity-preservation programs and develop rules to be enacted by the agriculture department regarding GMOs. The committee will also hold hearings for public input. We have repeatedly witnessed the negative impact of GMOs on farmers, and SB 387 guarantees needed protections for those who could be affected.

I have also shored up criminal law with SB 660, which keeps the statute of limitations on criminal cases from applying to the time between developing a DNA profile from evidence collected at the crime scene and publicly identifying the accused as a result of the profile. This legislation, which I presented to the Senate Judiciary and Civil and Criminal Jurisprudence Committee, allows law enforcement the time it needs to utilize an important tool in fighting crime.

Lawmakers are taking the week of March 19 to return to our districts, but we expect to stay very busy in the remaining weeks of session. I will use that time to see these important issues through the legislative process.

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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.