



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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Keeping the Faith for Old and Young

JEFFERSON CITY — We in the State Senate have taken steps this week to end a couple of practices that are just plain wrong: the taxing of Social Security benefits and ignoring the role faith-based organizations play in the social fabric of our communities. Both measures are important to the people in my district as well as those across the state.

Missouri is one of just 15 states that still taxes Social Security. How can we justify taking money from a benefit that is supposed to help people make it through their Golden Years with the essentials such as food and healthcare?

House Bill 444 will exempt from state taxation Social Security benefits and some non-private pensions such as those from firefighters, policemen, teachers, veterans, railroad, and federal employees in civil service security. We're phasing in the plan over the next six years to keep our revenue coffers from taking too big of a hit all at once. I believe this measure will also act as an economic enhancement catalyst that will attract more retirees to either stay in or re-locate to Missouri. I'm glad HB 444 received such wide, bi-partisan support with just three senators voting against the bill. It shows that the debate that went into the early morning hours could produce a measure that pleases just about everyone.

Senate Bill 46, the Faith-Based Liaison Act, which I sponsored, says the state's Social Services director will appoint regional department employees to serve as liaisons to faith-based organizations in their areas. Their primary function will be to promote faith-based organizations as a way to provide community services to those who normally receive assistance from public programs run by the department. We cannot keep pretending that our churches and communities of faith don't do more than offer a kind word and a prayer to those most in need of some vital

services. You only need to look at how the churches responded when storms ravaged our part of the state to recognize just how important they are to each and every community.

These are a couple of pieces of important legislation that I know will literally keep the faith with everyone from our oldest to our youngest citizens.

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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.