



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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Stopping Scrap Metal Thieves

JEFFERSON CITY — A growing epidemic in parts of Missouri is leaving some people without telephone, electricity, and the tools to make their livings. I'm talking about the theft of copper wire, cables, and machine parts from the power lines, telephone cables, and center pivot irrigation units. Thieves are selling these materials for just pennies of what it costs to fix what was broken.

In Southeast Missouri, the thefts are costing our farmers anywhere from \$4,000 to \$10,000 to repair each irrigation pivot that is damaged. And the precious time lost during a growing season can never be made up. It's time we take action to stop this crime.

First of all, we need to get a handle on this problem that is growing across the state. A series of community meetings have already started this week in Liberty, fellow lawmaker Sen. Luann Ridgeway's district. They will continue on Tuesday Dec. 4th at 2 p.m. at the St. Peters City Hall in Sen. Tom Dempsey's district and will finish on Thursday, December 6 at 2 p.m. at the Poplar Bluff City Hall in our district. I want to encourage all Missourians to attend these meetings and help provide input on ways to curb this copper theft.

For my part, I'm already planning on introducing legislation for the coming session that will help curb this crime. My bill would require sellers of scrap metal to provide identification to the purchasers of that metal. The buyers would also have to keep some kind of records on who sold them the scrap metal they bought and, if possible, the license number and description of the vehicle they used. This will give police and sheriff's departments valuable information they need to track down any potential thieves. I know the requirements kind of put the onus on the scrap dealers to enforce the law, but we've got to do something to stop these thefts.

Finally, I'm asking you, my friends and neighbors, to keep an eye out for anything that might seem a bit suspicious. If you see someone you don't know out there working on your neighbor's center pivots, don't be afraid to call it in. If you see a truck full of copper wire that

looks like it might have been hastily stripped off a telephone pole and thrown in the bed of the pickup, let your local law enforcement officers know. The worst that could happen is that they have the right to have that scrap metal, and it ends up being a friendly encounter with the sheriff that is quickly cleared up. But you never know when you might stop a thief who would have shut down some farmer's livelihood or cutoff the power or phone service from an elderly person isolated in the country. It's a chance for each of us to take care of one another.

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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.