



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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A Weekly Column for the
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Protecting the Interests of Rural Missouri

JEFFERSON CITY – The bill lawmakers passed last year which changed the state Medicaid program to MO HealthNet established a committee to oversee the new healthcare program. However, I'm not happy about the makeup of the MO HealthNet Oversight Committee.

It certainly seems biased not to have any representation from rural Missouri on that committee, so I have filed a series of bills to expand the committee to ensure the interests of rural Missouri are considered. For example, two of the four doctors on the committee should be Doctors of Osteopathy, who are the primary caregivers in rural Missouri. Our rural health clinics also should be represented on the oversight committee since that is where so many of us receive our healthcare. I also think optometrists and nurses should be represented on the panel since they are a vital part of our healthcare system. Podiatrists tell me there should be a place for them on the committee, and I agree. I think we should have a broad spectrum of representation, especially from the healthcare field, because there is no one better to provide us with information about how to manage our health than doctors. My bills would expand the oversight committee to 27 members to provide a more rounded opinion while protecting the interests of rural Missouri.

Another issue coming to the surface is the mandatory National Animal ID System from the federal government, a program I am adamantly opposed to. Last year we had a discussion on the merits of a mandatory system versus a voluntary system and I absolutely support a voluntary identification program. If a farmer wants to identify his herd and protect those specific traits that may be worth more in the market so he can earn more, I'm all for it.

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But it's wrong for the federal government to come in and tell farmers that we have to participate. Provisions were added to a bill so that if a fair gets state money, it cannot require a Premise ID in order for kids to show their livestock. The same thing applies to the Missouri State Fair. In fact, any entity that receives state funding cannot require a Premise ID under my legislation. It just boils down to a matter of local control, which I firmly believe in. We don't need folks in Washington telling Missouri farmers how to manage their livestock.

I'm also worried about the cost of this ID program. We have 62,000 cattle farmers in Missouri, and the average herd is fewer than 30 head. When you start asking farmers to put expensive tags on their animals and to purchase reading devices and record-keeping devices, a lot of farmers will just quit raising cattle because of the added costs.

Last year some citizens in Lewis County contacted my office with concerns about the safety of students at Highland High School in Lewistown. They were worried about the speed of traffic near the school and concerned the entrances to the school were hard to see. I met with members of the school board, school administrators and officials from MoDOT to try to find a solution. I'm happy to report that this month we reached an agreement with MoDOT to fix the problems. The school entrances will have reflective markings, the high school signs will be moved further down the road so motorists see them sooner, and the speed limit will be lowered from 55 mph to 45 mph from 7-9 a.m. and from 3-5 p.m. My biggest concern was for the safety of the students, and I'm glad we were able to work together to come up with a solution. My office is extremely proud of the school board, the school administrators and MoDOT for coming together to solve this issue.

Finally, it's been quite a week here at the Capitol with the governor saying he has chosen not to run for office again. I certainly respect his decision and wish him well. However, the accomplishments the governor talked about from the podium during his State of the State address are not the same priorities Missouri families discuss around the dinner table.

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.