



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
Week of April 14, 2008**

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Milk & Money

JEFFERSON CITY – We started work this week on the \$22.5 billion state budget. The process begins in the House early in the session. Once the budget bills are approved by the House, they are sent over to the Senate. Senators typically make several changes to the budget bills submitted by the House, so a conference committee of House and Senate members gets together to try to reconcile the two versions. Both chambers must then approve the final version before the budget bills can be sent to the governor.

The Senate budget includes a three percent pay increase for state employees. I argued on the Senate floor that a better way to reward our hardworking state employees is to give them a flat \$1,056 raise, which will put more money into the pockets of those who need it most. It takes more to retire comfortably these days; that's why I asked the state to increase its deferred compensation rate from \$25 to \$35 to give our state employees an opportunity to build their nest eggs. In these tough economic times we should do all we can for our front line employees who face rising gas and insurance prices and need to be able to meet their personal obligations.

The Senate Agriculture Committee this week heard testimony on a bill that would prevent content labels on milk containers. Dairy farmers want to be allowed to tell consumers that their milk does not contain added hormones. Surveys show that 88% of people want to know what's in their food.

Producers say milk that does not contain added hormones brings an additional 90 cents a gallon. Trying to tell folks they can't accurately label their product is anti-competitive and anti-free speech. The bottom line is folks have a right to know what they're buying in the grocery store.

I was bothered a bit this week when the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee offered an amendment to give \$120 million to a French Canadian corporation. The appropriations committee took out \$50,000 this year for the Gamm Corporation in LaBelle, which provides jobs training opportunities for underemployed and unemployed workers. Gamm does a tremendous job placing workers and increasing their earning potential. Meantime, the appropriations chairman wants to give \$120 million to a foreign company. This comes at a time when MOHELA has failed to make its second quarterly payment to the state. I don't want the state to be in a similar situation with Bombardier Aerospace where we give them a ton of money and then they come back later and tell us they can't repay the state as promised. Plus, the Legislature made a lot of promises last year to build new buildings on college campuses and I think we should keep those promises before we dole out money to Bombardier.

We welcomed a lot of visitors to the Capitol this week, including my lovely wife Cheryl, my daughter Laura and my niece Jill Totten from North Carolina, who I had the pleasure of introducing to the Senate. We also visited with folks from the Missouri Farmers Union and had a surprise visit from a group of eighth grade students from Madison, who got to tour the Whispering Gallery in the Capitol. I also had the pleasure of introducing a group of Tom Sawyers and Becky Thatchers from Hannibal to the full Senate. These young people are carrying on a proud tradition and promoting life in small town America. I also spoke to the Missouri Association of Counties and had many of my county officials drop by the Capitol office. I always appreciate my county officials because government is best that's closest to the people.

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.