



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Health Care Bill Advances

JEFFERSON CITY – This week the Senate gave first round approval to a major health care bill that does not go as far as some of us would like it to, but it does make some improvements. A lot of Senate Democrats have been trying to get the health care cuts of 2005 restored. Those cuts eliminated health care coverage for about 100,000 Missourians and eliminated health care services for thousands more. We tried to amend Senate Bill 1283 to reverse those cuts but were rejected each time.

However, I did manage to add a few amendments to the bill to improve it. First of all, I was successful in expanding the MO HealthNet Committee, which oversees the state's new healthcare delivery system. When the members were named last fall, it was brought to our attention that rural Missouri was being under-represented. Right now there are four doctors on the committee. My amendment requires one of the two primary care physicians to be from rural Missouri and one of the two physicians to be from rural Missouri. My amendment also adds a representative from a rural health clinic, a not-for-profit health network serving rural counties, a mental health professional, a nurse, an optometrist, and patient advocates representing children, the disabled and the elderly. 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 amendment expands the oversight committee to 29 members to provide a more rounded opinion while protecting the interests of rural Missouri.

I also added an amendment which regulates insurance agents selling Medicare Advantage plans. This bill creates a two-day waiting period before an insurance agent can complete the sale, it requires a statement that Medicare Advantage plans are not Medigap supplement plans, and it

requires a statement advising the applicant to confirm with his or her health care providers whether or not the provider has contracted with the Medicare Advantage plan to provide medical services. It doesn't do any good to have health insurance if you cannot get healthcare services.

Finally, SB 1283 provides wellness and prevention services for state employees. I successfully offered an amendment that says state employees don't have to pay out of pocket for these preventive services. We're trying to encourage healthy lifestyles, but given the rising cost of healthcare, folks are not going to shell out even more money for optional programs.

This week a House Committee heard testimony on a bill to repeal the 10% ethanol standard we passed last year. First of all, this repeal effort is premature. The new ethanol standard should be given time to work. Plus, I think it's the patriotic thing to do, at least in the sense of helping us to become more self-reliant. Right now we replace six percent of the gas we use with biofuels. In fact, Missouri is the second cheapest state in the country to buy gas, and I think a lot of that has to do with our ethanol standard. Missouri motorists are paying an average of 12-cents less per gallon thanks to our ethanol standard.

One other point needs to be made about our ethanol policy – we made sure our ethanol plants are operated by Missouri farmers, so the money stays in Missouri.

We had a lot of folks visit the Capitol this week, including Pike County Collector Marty Morrison and Ralls County Collector Connie Berry. Sixty 4th graders and their teachers Mrs. Ogar, Mrs. Robley, Mrs. Webber from Hawthorn Elementary School in Mexico toured the Capitol and stopped by our office to visit, and Elizabeth Bradberry, who lives in Center, was appointed to the Missouri State University Board of Regents. We also welcomed folks from Missouri's Rural Electric Coops.

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.