



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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A Weekly Column for the
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Old Computers & Heat Relief

JEFFERSON CITY – Since summer seems to have come a bit early this year I thought I'd talk about a bill we passed this year that will help folks who struggle with their utility bills whenever it gets too hot or too cold. Senate Bill 720 establishes a "hot weather rule" for Missouri similar to the cold weather rule that's been in place since 1977.

The cold weather rule Missouri adopted in 1977 has become a national model. It prevents utility companies from turning off the electricity or natural gas to your home if the temperature drops below 32 degrees (it does not apply to city-owned power companies, electric coops or companies that deliver propane). The cold weather rule also allows folks to stretch their utility payments over a 12-month period, it does not require folks to pay a deposit if they meet their minimum payments, and it requires customers to be notified by mail and in person before service is cut off. The cold weather rule runs from November 1 to March 31 each year.

The new hot weather rule runs from June 1 to September 30. Like the cold weather rule, the hot weather rule prevents natural gas or electricity providers from disconnecting service when the mercury is expected to rise above 95 degrees or the heat index is forecast to climb above 105 degrees. It's getting tough to make ends meet with the rising cost of fuel, and I think this legislation will help folks manage their utility bills while helping to keep them comfortable in their homes during the heat of the summer.

SB 720 also increases the amount that can be paid from the Utilicare Stabilization Fund each year from \$600 to \$800 on behalf of eligible households. Missouri's Utilicare program was established in 1979 to help low-income families with their utility costs. In recent history, Utilicare has been funded solely by the federal government, but in 2006 the state began to once

again supplement the program with state dollars so more Missourians could receive assistance. The additional funding was added to the Utilicare Stabilization Fund for the purpose of aiding the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). LIHEAP ensures that approximately 22,000 Missouri families who would likely otherwise have their service cut off because they can't pay their utility bills have heat through the winter.

Finally, Senate Bill 720 will help Missouri deal with a growing problem that all states are facing – what to do with our old computers? Computers seem to become obsolete about a year after you buy them, but nobody knows what to do with the old ones since they're not accepted at landfills because they can leach toxic chemicals into the soil. SB 720 requires computer manufacturers to set up "recovery plans" for the collection of old computers and the recycling or reuse of their obsolete equipment. These companies will have to submit their recovery plans to the DNR before they can sell new computers in Missouri. The measure also requires the DNR to educate consumers about the recycling and reuse of computers and it requires DNR to put together a website where folks can access all of this information.

On Friday, we went to the Ribbon Cutting and USDA Check Presentation to the Monroe City Sheltered Workshop. They have expanded the Sheltered Workshop, which does a lot of good for the area.

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.