



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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A Weekly Column for the
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Ag Bill Signed Into Law

JEFFERSON CITY – I want to begin this week by thanking all of the folks in northeast Missouri who have been helping their friends and neighbors in the communities that border the Mississippi River as those towns deal with flooding. We've seen some highways in the district closed due to flooding, and some communities have started sandbagging to keep the rising river at bay. If you have some time to help your neighbors sandbag, I know it would be greatly appreciated. It's tough, dirty work, but helping others is also very rewarding and might lead to new friendships. For everyone who has already pitched in to help folks dealing with flooding, I just want to say thanks.

Last week the governor signed Senate Bill 931 into law, which makes a number of changes that impact farmers and rural Missourians. Probably the most controversial part of this bill deals with the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) program. Under SB 931, the state of Missouri can support a *voluntary* animal ID program, but the bill prohibits the Missouri Department of Agriculture from requiring farmers to register under the USDA's NAIS program unless lawmakers give the department the authority to do so. SB 931 also allows farmers to withdraw from the NAIS at any time and requires that all of their personal information be deleted when they withdraw. I have always believed that government is best that is closest to the people, and we don't need a bunch of bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., telling Missouri farmers and producers how to run their operations.

The act also continues the work we started in Missouri on promoting the manufacture and use of ethanol in our vehicles. SB 931 creates a tax credit to help defray the costs of building a qualified alternative fuel refueling station. Missouri has made some headway in producing enough ethanol to reduce our reliance on foreign sources of energy, but we need to increase the number of gas stations that can sell E-85 and other types of alternative fuels if we really want to make a dent in the amount of fuel we import from overseas. SB 931 also provides incentives to producers who make fuel ethanol from biomass.

We also wanted to make sure that incentives offered by the state go to entities that operate within Missouri, so SB 931 says a new generation cooperative must operate within the state in order to receive either the Agricultural Product Utilization Contributor tax credit or the New Generation Cooperative Incentive tax credit. I think it just makes sense to keep our tax dollars here where they will do the most good.

The new law also makes a few changes that will affect large animal veterinary students. First of all, it allows the Department of Agriculture to forgive as much as \$20,000 per year in students loans made through the Large Animal Veterinary Student Loan Program for graduates who work in under-served parts of Missouri. However, if a graduate fails to fulfill his obligations to work in under-served areas, that person will have to begin repaying the loan within six months. Vet students can accumulate a lot of debt while pursuing their degrees, and I think this provision provides a powerful incentive to help them repay that debt while they help out in areas where the need is greatest. The new law also allows the Ag Department to grant a loan deferment to anyone on active duty in any branch of the U.S. armed forces.

Senate Bill 931 includes a number of other provisions, like creating a sales tax exemption for fencing materials and another one for the purchase of equipment used in the planting, harvesting, processing or transporting of forestry products. It also makes spotted knapweed subject to existing noxious weed control laws.

On Friday, June 13, I attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the new minor league baseball team in Hannibal. Clemens Field is being remodeled and new locker rooms are being installed and everything should be ready to go in time for next season

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.