



State Senator

Robin Wright-Jones

District 5

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Much Work Left to Be Done This Legislative Session

Lawmakers in the Senate recently debated several important measures on the Senate floor that address a wide variety of topics — topics that are vital to our state and its citizens. Issues such as telecommunications, energy production, and tax credits are usually at the forefront of debate in the Missouri Senate. This past legislative week included discussion on all three of these issues, and much to my dismay, discussion must continue and a compromise must yet be reached before the legislation can help those it sets out to support.

The telecommunications industry in our state is made up of a diverse group of companies, including local exchange carriers, wireless service providers, and long-distance carriers. [Senate Bill 555](#) addresses the local exchange carriers in our state. The measure would require certain telephone companies in Missouri to offer the same in- and out-of-state exchange access rates. Under this bill, these carriers would have a 5-year period to bring down the intrastate rates to reflect the interstate rates. Currently, if you make a call within the state of Missouri, it costs you substantially more than if you place the call outside of our state. It is not acceptable for our intrastate rates to be higher than our interstate rates.

Lawmakers also addressed the future of energy policy in our state. The Missouri Senate spent more than 10 hours debating a bill that would do just that. [Senate Bill 228](#) would create the Missouri Clean and Renewable Energy Construction Act which would lift Missouri's current prohibition on construction-work-in-progress (CWIP) billing. The repeal of this law would allow the cost of building certain types of renewable plants, including nuclear, to be included in customers' utility rates during construction of the clean energy, low-emission facility. There are several provisions already in place in the bill that would protect our state's consumers. For instance, seniors 65 and older and the disabled earning less than \$40,000 a year would not have to contribute to the building costs. And if the company decides to sell the license to operate the plant—or the actual plant—consumers would receive all of the proceeds, plus interest.

A couple of weeks, ago I wrote about the importance of Historic Preservation Tax Credits to the 5th Senatorial District. These tax credits are included in two large economic development bills currently being considered by the Missouri Senate. [Senate Bill 45](#), among other provisions, expands the Quality Jobs Act and changes various tax incentives in our state. The Senate measure would cap Historic Preservation Tax Credits at \$125 million beginning in FY 2010. No Historic Preservation Tax Credits would be authorized after June 30, 2015.

In its current form, [House Bill 191](#) would change the laws regarding several economic development programs and establish the Small Business and Entrepreneurial Growth Act. Under current law, Historic Preservation Tax Credits are authorized for 25 percent of eligible rehabilitation costs. House Bill 191 would reduce this amount of the credit to 20 percent. Discussing and possibly altering the operating parameters of the credit is one thing; but almost all agree that without Historic Preservation Tax Credits, our state and those who visit, work, and live in Missouri would not be able to experience the true value of our state's history and historic properties.

The session's May 15th adjournment deadline is fast approaching, and yet the Republican-led Senate still needs to take final action on the phone rate, power plant financing and tax credit legislation before the measures can be put into action. With just five legislative weeks left (during which some of this time needs to be spent addressing our state's budget) I share a concern held by many of my colleagues about being able to pass these extremely important measures for the citizens of our state. It's time to put personal and political differences aside—and Missourians at the forefront.

To find out more information about the legislation mentioned in this column or other matters involving state government, please feel free to contact my office at (573) 751-2606.

*Senator Robin Wright-Jones represents a portion of
St. Louis City in the Missouri Senate.*



Contact Information

Capitol Office
State Capitol
Room 425
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Phone Number:
573.751.2606

Fax:
573.751.7638

Website:
<http://www.senate.mo.gov/wright-jones>

District Office:
3303 Olive Ave.
St. Louis, MO
63103

Phone Number:
314.533.8800

Fax:
314.533.8600