



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Session Review

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri General Assembly approved 162 bills and sent them to the governor during the 2009 legislative session. Of those, 48 bills originated in the Missouri Senate and 114 bills originated in the House. 162 bills may sound like a lot, but it's really just a drop in the bucket compared to the 1,700-plus measures introduced in both houses of the legislature this year. That also tells you something about the difficulty of taking good ideas and turning them into good state laws – it often takes years for a good idea to gain enough traction to make it through both chambers to be sent to the governor.

This week I thought I would highlight some of the major bills approved by the General Assembly and sent to the governor. Perhaps the most important bill we debated this year was the big economic development bill that was approved in the final hours of the legislative session. It was critical the legislature approve some kind of jobs bill this year because of the downturn in the economy that has impacted families across Missouri and across the nation. House Bill 191 – the omnibus economic development bill - will help create jobs by increasing the cap on the Quality Jobs Program from \$60-\$80-million annually. These tax incentives are provided to companies wishing to locate or expand in Missouri. In return, they must promise to create or add jobs that pay well and offer health benefits. HB 191 also increases the cap on the New Markets Tax Credit program. I fought for this increase because the program is vital to getting our manufacturing plants going again, like current efforts to reopen the brick plant in Mexico. Another provision in the bill prohibits increases in user fees for small business licenses for four years. The measure also makes it easier for the public to find out who is

receiving tax credits from the state and what those tax credits are supposed to accomplish by visiting the Missouri Accountability Portal.

Missouri lawmakers also sent a comprehensive education bill to the governor. Senate Bill 291 ensures that all revenue collected from the repeal of casino loss limits (Prop. A) be deposited into the Classroom Trust Fund to be distributed to schools. Missouri voters who approved Proposition A last November intended the extra money to go to our public schools, but the ballot language left some loopholes that needed to be closed to make sure the measure did what voters were told it would do. SB 291 also creates the P-20 Council to help prepare students to enter the workforce; it creates the Missouri Senior Cadets program to give 12th grade students an opportunity to mentor younger students; it establishes methods for helping school districts apply for grants to prevent drop-outs; it requires elementary students to have a certain amount of physical activity each day, and it allows school boards to set a four-day school week instead of a five-day week.

One of the other major bills completed in the waning days of the session was the omnibus crime bill, the first large crime bill approved by the legislature in several years. House Bill 62 requires anyone who steals livestock or animals worth more than \$3,000 and who has pleaded guilty to serve at least 80% of his sentence; it bars certain sexual offenders from serving as an athletic coach, manager or trainer for any sports team with members younger than 17; it cracks down on some of the more outrageous behavior on our beautiful float streams and rivers; it strengthens the state's DUI laws, and it requires the Department of Health and Human Services to set up an education program regarding the financial exploitation of the elderly.

I want to take just a minute to thank everyone in Hannibal who worked together to restore the Tom and Huck statue that has been a must-stop for tourists for years. Three years ago the landmark was in such a state of disrepair that a plastic orange fence was installed to keep the public away. But thanks to the efforts of many civic-minded people in Hannibal, the statue's foundation has been restored and landscaping has been added, and Mark Twain's two most famous characters once again stand vigil over Sam Clemens' boyhood hometown.

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.