



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
Week of January 11, 2010**

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Taxing Questions

JEFFERSON CITY – Missouri lawmakers are lining up in opposition to a proposal from the Missouri State Tax Commission to increase taxes on our most productive farmland. I am joining an effort by my colleague Senator Bill Stouffer to reject the tax commission proposal. Agriculture is our state's number one industry, and I don't believe we should be increasing taxes on family farmers who are struggling with higher input costs and fluctuating commodity prices, not to mention the weather challenges. I know government entities are having a tough time because of declining state revenues due to the economic downturn, but we cannot make up the difference by putting the squeeze on our family farmers. Government officials have to learn to live within their means just like families across Missouri.

On the other hand, I do support giving our rural communities the ability to maintain rural cemeteries, many of which are covered with weeds and brush and are badly in need of attention. Under legislation I am sponsoring again this year, the government of any city, town, village or county may submit a property tax levy to the voters to pay for upkeep of these old cemeteries. The tax could not exceed one-fourth of one cent per one hundred dollars assessed valuation, and the tax could not be imposed without the approval of local voters.

I got the idea for this bill a couple of years ago after talking to Jim Perkins, a retired member of the U.S. Air Force living in Putnam County. Jim is with the Missouri Military Honor Team which performs military services for deceased veterans. He says a number of the cemeteries where those services are held are in poor condition. These old cemeteries are an important part of our heritage and need to be preserved and protected.

Now that the General Assembly is back in session, we're starting to welcome a lot of visitors to our Capitol office. This week we met with some folks from the Missouri Rural Crisis Center to discuss family farming issues, we talked about local control issues with some constituents who stopped by the office, and we visited with optometrists Dr. Miller of Hannibal, Dr. Thompson of Brookfield and Dr. Blackford of Kirksville.

I also plan to attend several Martin Luther King, Jr. commemorations during the next few days as we note the passing of this great man and his legacy. I would like to thank my colleague, Senator Rita Days, for putting together the MLK Day event at the Capitol again this year.

Finally, I want to welcome our intern for the 2010 session, Gil Carnegie. Gil is originally from Cedar Rapids, Iowa and is a junior majoring in Political Science at Truman State University in Kirksville. The Capitol is a unique classroom, and I'm sure Gil will learn a lot during his time here.

If you have any questions or comments about these or any other issues 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.