



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
Week of March 22, 2010**

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An Engaged Citizenry

JEFFERSON CITY – On Tuesday the Missouri State Senate did something a bit unusual; instead of the normal routine of morning floor debate followed by afternoon committee hearings followed by more floor debate in the evening, we spent most of the day discussing ideas to make state government more efficient. All of the ideas, hundreds of them from every part of the state, came from the people of Missouri. The Senate President Pro Tem created an initiative called “Rebooting Government” which asks Missouri citizens to submit their ideas to save money. This week the Pro Tem divided the 34 members of the Senate into eight groups to review those ideas. Each group was told to present at least five ideas to the full Senate for consideration.

I was assigned to the workgroup that considered ideas relating to Agriculture, the Outdoors and the Department of Natural Resources. Our group identified potential savings to the taxpayers of \$1.7-1.8 million. For example, one idea we thought had merit calls for one-week furloughs for employees of the departments of agriculture, natural resources and conservation. We also agreed with a citizen submission to consolidate some state laboratories and to combine certain boards and commissions.

The other workgroups included one for the Courts, the Department of Corrections and the Department of Public Safety; Education; General Government/Office of Administration; Retirement; Social Programs; Tax Structure and Transportation.

The Education Workgroup received ideas ranging from establishing a single IT site to train teachers for virtual schools to reducing staff at DESE or cutting back on middle management at DESE.

The Courts and Corrections Workgroup focused on getting the right mix of prisoners in our corrections system by providing sentencing alternatives for non-violent offenders.

The General Government/Office of Administration Workgroup suggested shortening the length of the legislative session, cancelling all newspaper and magazine subscriptions, and stopping the printing and distribution of the state manual or “Blue Book.”

The Retirement Workgroup contends millions of dollars could be saved by moving from a defined benefit retirement plan for state employees to a defined contribution retirement plan that’s become common in private industry.

Other cost-saving suggestions we received from Missourians include closing some state habilitation centers and transitioning clients to community-based care, charging fees for daycare licenses, charging fees for child support enforcement, capping all tax credits issued by the state, discontinuing the printing and free distribution of state roadmaps, ending subsidies for Amtrak and public transportation, and requiring just one license plate on vehicles.

Some of these ideas make sense and need to be pursued, while other ideas, like closing more MODOT maintenance sheds, would do more harm than good. One thing that is certain is we have to find about \$500 million in savings in order to balance the state budget, which is required by our state constitution. We have just six weeks remaining to get it done.

Missourians can continue to submit their ideas by visiting the Senate’s website at www.senate.mo.gov and clicking on the Rebooting Government logo. Submissions may be anonymous, and ideas will be accepted throughout the legislative session.

I would like to congratulate a couple of our communities for securing infrastructure grants. The Department of Economic Development has awarded an \$85,239 Community Development Block Grant to Alexandria for levee repairs, and a \$215,000 CDBG grant to Shelbina to demolish a couple of old commercial buildings downtown.

We welcomed a number of visitors to our Capitol office this week, including many of our local schools’ FFA chapters who were visiting for FFA Youth Leadership Day, several disability advocates, representatives from the credit unions, as well as Dan Devlin from Knox County, Paul Ewert from Hannibal, and Craig Shorten and Randy Smith from Kirksville who were down for Aviation Day.

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 W. Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.