



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
Week of April 19, 2010**

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Education “Reform”

JEFFERSON CITY – One of the most difficult jobs in the legislature got underway this week as five members of the Senate and five members of the House sat down together to try to reach a compromise on the fiscal year 2011 state budget. The ten members of the conference committee have just two weeks to reconcile the Senate’s \$23.1 billion budget proposal with the House’s \$23.6 billion plan. Once the committee reaches agreement on the 13 spending bills that make up the state budget, those bills will return to the House for approval before moving to the Senate for one final round of voting before the bills are sent to the governor. It’s going to be a very long two weeks for the members of the conference committee.

On the Senate floor this week we approved a proposed constitutional amendment (SJR 45) that would create a new State Board of Education which would have authority over K-12 education and would coordinate with our public higher education institutions. The legislature would determine the duties of this board during the next session. This new board would not have oversight over the University of Missouri, which has its own constitutionally-mandated governing board – the board of curators. I voted against SJR 45 because I do not believe it will improve the outcomes at our only public liberal arts institution – Truman State University in Kirksville.

Truman consistently ranks among the top liberal arts colleges in the nation, and was named the top college in the Midwest by US News & World Report for its commitment to teaching undergraduates. For the past 13 years, Truman has been named the top “Public University in the Midwest Region Master’s category” by US News & World Report’s annual “America’s Best Colleges” edition. In fact, over 99 percent of Truman graduates who report

their plans after graduation either find work or enroll in graduate school within six months of graduation.

The graduation rate at Truman is 78 percent, compared to a graduation rate ranging from 23-78 percent for all Missouri public, four-year institutions. What is perhaps most impressive about Truman is that it provides students with exceptional training for the future without putting students deep into debt. The Princeton Review ranks Truman the second best value in public higher education, while Kiplinger's Personal Finance magazine ranks Truman 26th on its list of the 100 best values in public colleges that "combine outstanding economic value with top-notch education."

I fear the exceptional quality and value of Missouri's only public liberal arts college will suffer if this newly-created board is given too much control. I also think this constitutional amendment will inject more politics into higher education by pitting different regions against each other in the battle over the allocation of scarce resources.

I am looking forward to attending the groundbreaking ceremony for the Missouri Plant Science Center in Mexico on Monday, April 26. After the groundbreaking, the Audrain County Cattlemen, Audrain County Pork Producers and the Missouri Biotechnology Association will sponsor a lunch for the guests at the 4-H Center in Mexico.

This important project is a partnership of the City of Mexico, University of Missouri and Missouri Technology Corporation. Monday's groundbreaking is just the first step in what will be a much larger development that extends Missouri's leading position in plant science into Northeast Missouri. Soy Labs of Fairfield, California will relocate to Missouri and be the first tenant in the new facility when construction is complete. I have worked hard with others over the past few years to secure funding for the plant science center and am excited this project is finally becoming reality.

We welcomed a lot of guests to our Capitol office this week, including Mike Dierks and Mike Sparks, with Spartan Light Metal Products; a number of disability rights advocates; Melissa Vannoy and the Knox County 4th Grade Class; Clarence Elementary School students; and Elizabeth Grove of Monroe City, who visited the Capitol on behalf of the Missouri Rural Water Association.

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 e-mail at wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov, or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 W. Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.