



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Special Session

JEFFERSON CITY – This week the Missouri General Assembly returned to the Capitol for a special legislative session called by the governor. The purpose of the special session is to try to pass tax incentives for the Ford manufacturing plant in Claycomo in an effort to convince the auto company not to leave Missouri. The plant near Kansas City currently employs 3,700 people, and I don't have a problem with state government trying to keep those jobs in our state. I do have a problem with the way the legislature wants to pay for those tax breaks for Ford.

The governor's call for a special session also includes his request to pass a pension reform bill that failed during the regular session. I voted against the pension reform bill this year because I do not believe we should ask the lowest paid state employees in the country to contribute four percent of their salaries toward their retirement. In order for state government to function effectively, we need good employees. In order to attract men and women who are willing to work for less than they might earn in the private sector, the state has offered fairly generous retirement benefits to make up for the low pay. If we reduce those retirement benefits, I fear we won't be able to attract qualified people to work for the state. Missouri state employees now earn 26% less than the national average and rank 50th in the nation in pay.

Supporters of the tax breaks for Ford want to pay for those incentives by using the savings generated by reforming the pensions of our state workers. I have a real problem with those who say they want tax credit reform but then propose another tax credit and want to pay for it by taking away from state workers. That's just not the way to do it. Besides, we've been down this road before.

For years, the state did everything in its power to entice Ford to keep operating its automotive manufacturing plant in Hazelwood, but the company ultimately closed that plant anyway. We have received no guarantees from Ford that it will keep the Claycomo plant operating if we give the company \$150-million in tax breaks over the next ten years.

Like the old saying goes, “Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.” If the legislature approves the tax breaks for Ford, it should include language to get the money back if Ford ultimately decides to move those jobs out of state.

Again, I’m not sure why a company that reported more than two billion dollars in profits in just the last quarter should need a few million in tax breaks from our state to keep its production plant operating. I guess we’ll see where the chips fall in the next week or so.

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.