



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Highway 36 Project Nearing Completion

JEFFERSON CITY – Missouri lawmakers this week approved the \$150 million tax incentive package for Ford and its suppliers across the state after opponents of the bill staged a 21 hour filibuster on the Senate floor. Lawmakers also passed a companion bill to pay for the tax breaks for auto manufacturers. That bill reduces the state pensions of new state employees by four percent and requires new state employees to work several more years before becoming eligible for retirement. I spoke and voted against the pension reduction bill on the last day of the Special Session. I think we are making our new state employees the latest victims of the state's current budget crisis. Hundreds of state workers have been laid off, while services and programs vital to our citizens have been drastically cut. Now we are making employment in the public sector much less attractive, since our state employees already are among the lowest paid in the nation. At some point legislators are going to have to come to terms with the fact we cannot simply fire people and cut important programs to balance the budget.

I had the honor and pleasure of attending several ribbon-cutting ceremonies in towns along the new four-lane Highway 36 from Macon to Hannibal last weekend. Highway 36 will be a four-lane corridor from St. Joseph to Hannibal when the project is completed in about a month. The expansion of Highway 36 will make the road much safer for families to travel on and should spur economic development along the corridor. It's a project that's been eight years in the making and it took the cooperation of federal, state, county and local officials to make it happen.

This was a grassroots effort in every sense; folks in communities along Highway 36 began meeting in 2002 to see what needed to be done to get the project completed. Voters in

Macon, Marion, Monroe and Shelby counties agreed to shoulder some of the burden to make this important project happen, with \$7 million coming from the federal government and the other \$50 million coming from MODOT. The 52 mile section from Macon to Hannibal is the final leg of the now four-lane Chicago to Kansas City Expressway.

The original route from St. Joseph to Hannibal, first called the “Houn’ Dog Trail,” was the vision of the Automobile Club of St. Joseph in 1910. Its members wanted to take advantage of the growing popularity of the Model Ts Henry Ford was rolling off his assembly lines. The section of the road from St. Joe to Hannibal was later renamed the “Pershing Transportation Route” in honor of General John “Blackjack” Pershing, who was born in Laclede along Highway 36. In 1999, Highway 36 was permanently dedicated as the VFW Memorial Highway in honor of our veterans.

The dedication ceremonies for the new four-lane route were held last weekend in Macon, Clarence, Shelbina, Lakenan, Monroe City and Hannibal. There are simply too many people to thank individually for the vision, dedication and hard work needed to complete this project. It is amazing what can be accomplished when our communities work together on a common goal.

It’s fair season once again, and I plan to attend as many of our county fairs this summer as humanly possible. As a farmer, I’m partial to the livestock shows because these young farmers spend a lot of time raising and caring for their animals, and they get to make a little money to boot. I am encouraged about the future of family farming; I believe we are leaving it in very capable hands. You know, you hear all of these stories about kids not having anything to do but sit around and play video games, but come to a county fair and you will meet some young people who have a commitment to not only 4-H and FFA, but to farming and keeping family values alive in rural Missouri.

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.