



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

Wes Shoemyer
18th Senate District

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 434
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

**A Weekly Column for the
Week of July 26, 2010**

**Capitol Office:
(573) 751-7852**

The Future of Education in Missouri

JEFFERSON CITY – The state of Missouri currently ranks 30th in the nation in the number of 25-34 year olds with a degree beyond high school. Since we are swamped daily with facts and figures from the Internet and the 24-hour cable news shows, let me tell you why I think this statistic matters. There is a very real link between the economic health of a state and the quality and level of education of its citizens.

For years our country had been the world's leading economy because we had offered the best education to our citizens. Today, the United States ranks 10th among industrialized nations in the percentage of young people with college degrees, and among the states, Missouri ranks 30th, behind Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois. One of the main factors a business considers when deciding where to build a new factory or office complex is the education level of its citizens. So it seems to follow that if Missouri wants to improve its economy over the long haul, we must do a better job of providing an affordable, quality education to our young people.

The school funding formula Missouri adopted in 2005 is an "adequacy" formula, in that it seeks to ensure an adequate education for each student. What we need is an "equity" formula that ensures all children are given equal opportunities to learn, whether they are from wealthy, urban districts or poorer, rural districts. I'm afraid the funding formula of 2005 has actually created more disparity between wealthy school districts and rural school districts.

I serve on the Missouri Senate Educated Citizenry 2020 Committee, which is tasked with finding ways to improve academic achievement and move more of our young people into an educational experience beyond high school. However, our focus is not just on higher

education. The committee, which met this week in Kansas City, also is charged with developing a long-term strategy and plan for an education system where every child enters school ready to learn. We can do this by making sure all children have access to a quality education and by providing support for stay-at-home parents.

Our committee also is studying the development of an educational system that educates students who are capable of attending and becoming productive and successful citizens who are prepared for global competition.

It's a difficult challenge, especially in tough economic times. State funding for higher education has been frozen for the past two years in exchange for a commitment from our major universities not to raise tuition. Meantime, we are falling behind on our state's promise to fully fund the education formula that determines how we allocate state dollars to our public schools. Investing in education is investing in the future of our state, and if we continue to shortchange those investments, we will all pay the price down the road.

This year marks the tenth anniversary since POET Biorefining established an ethanol plant in northeast Missouri. POET Biorefining - Macon was the first ethanol plant in Missouri and it's the largest company by revenue in northeast Missouri. POET Biorefining's plant near Laddonia began operations in September of 2006. The state-of-the-art ethanol production facility consumes approximately 16 million bushels of locally-grown corn to produce 50 million gallons of ethanol annually.

These ethanol plants are owned by Missouri farmers, and they have helped improve the economic well-being of surrounding communities. These plants also help us reduce our dependence on foreign sources of energy, producing fuel right here in the Midwest instead of importing our fuel from the volatile Mideast.

Finally, our locally-owned electric cooperatives are starting to hold their annual membership meetings, which typically feature good country cooking, games for the kids, entertainment for the adults and a business meeting. Our local electric coops led the way in providing electricity to our rural areas, and I think it is past time we followed their example by expanding high-speed Internet service to our rural areas. This will make our businesses more competitive, allow our students to achieve the same success as their city cousins, and encourage economic development in our rural areas.

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.