



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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High-Speed Access

JEFFERSON CITY – Progress often comes slowly to rural Missouri, but that’s just something you get used to when you live in a small town or on a farm. For example, the Rural Electrification Administration was created during the New Deal to provide electricity to the more than six million farms that lacked it. From 1935-39, the number of farms connected to the electrical grid more than doubled. By the early 1970s, 98 percent of all farms in the United States had electricity. In addition to providing electricity for lighting and household purposes, REA’s efforts and those of our local electric cooperatives also allowed for the mechanization of many farming operations, such as threshing, milking, and hoisting grain for storage.

A similar project is underway in Missouri to bring high-speed Internet access to our farms and small communities. This week the governor announced that two companies will invest \$85 million to provide high-speed Internet access to 660,000 homes and businesses across northern Missouri. BlueBird Media will use a grant from the U.S. Commerce Department’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration to build an ultra-high capacity network that will make broadband affordable and accessible to homes and businesses throughout northern Missouri. The other company, United Electric Cooperative, will build a similar network in western Missouri.

BlueBird Media is part of a public/private partnership created by Governor Nixon called **MoBroadbandNow** to expand the reach of broadband across our state. This expansion will allow Missouri businesses to be more competitive, help Missouri doctors and hospitals to better serve patients, allow Missouri schools to provide a fuller education to students, and give Missouri consumers better access to the benefits of the Internet.

The BlueBird Media project is expected to create 706 jobs for a two-year period during construction, with another 40 ongoing jobs after the network is implemented.

This week's announcement follows on the heels of the first round of grants announced by the federal government in January. Ralls County Electric Cooperative, a MoBroadbandNow partner based in New London, received a \$19.1 million competitive award to expand broadband Internet to residential and commercial customers in northeast Missouri.

In other news, the governor says federal officials have granted his request for federal disaster assistance in 29 Missouri counties hit by floods and severe storms. The disaster declaration lets local governments be reimbursed for 75 percent of their costs of repairing storm-related damage. The declaration covers damage from floods, tornadoes and other severe weather from June 12 to July 31. Counties in the 18th Senatorial District included in the federal disaster declaration are Adair, Clark, Lewis, Putnam, Schuyler and Scotland.

Meanwhile, damage assessments have just been completed by the State Emergency Management Agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency in nine other Missouri counties that were impacted by these storms. Those counties are Audrain, Knox, Linn, Marion, Monroe, Pike, Ralls, Shelby, St. Louis and the City of St. Louis. The governor is asking the president to expand his disaster declaration to include those counties as well.

Finally, I would like to offer my congratulations to Megan Westhoff of Memphis, Missouri, who was crowned the 2010 Missouri State Fair Queen on August 13. Megan received the highest score out of 60 contestants in the competition. Megan is the representative of the Northeast Missouri Fair, and is the daughter of Scott and Angela Westhoff. Megan has been showing sheep at the fair since age seven and has also participated in beef cattle demonstrations. She has been an active member of 4-H and FFA and held the position of Missouri State FFA Officer.

Currently, Megan is a junior at Northwest Missouri State University majoring in elementary education with a double minor in special education and early childhood special education.

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.