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The Stouffer Report: Back to Jefferson City for Special Session

Every few years, Missouri lawmakers get the call from the governor to come back to Jefferson City to resolve unfinished business. This is one of those years.

Members of the General Assembly made the trip back to the Capitol on June 24 to debate two items: [tax incentives for certain automotive manufacturers](#) and [state employee pensions](#). The original bills, considered during the regular session, are not the same measures we will consider this special legislative session. Basically, we start over on these measures during the extraordinary, or special, session.

The tax incentives measure specifically targets the Ford Motor Company plant in Claycomo. Proponents say creating tax incentives for Ford to keep its Claycomo plant going is bigger than preserving the 3,700 jobs there. It is about building the next generation of vehicles, which Ford can do with some renovations to their Claycomo plant. It is also about all the folks throughout Missouri who work for parts places and other businesses that depend on Ford keeping its operations alive in this state. This includes several businesses and employees in my Senate district. Many believe these are the kinds of public-private partnerships that will lead Missouri into new prosperity that is much-needed right now. Others worry this is Missouri's version of an auto bailout and more government intrusion into the private sector.

Paying for the incentives for Ford would come from making changes to the state employee retirement and pension systems. Missouri is one of only a few entities in the country with a "defined benefit" plan. Most companies and states have "defined contribution"

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plans. Existing state employees would not be affected. A new plan would start on January 1, 2011, making changes to state employee pensions and saving the state millions of dollars for years to come. But, I want to stress, the pension bill does not include teachers or current state employees. It did not during the regular session and it will not during our special session.

Some folks have concerns about the cost of a special session. It costs approximately \$100,000 a day to hold session in Jefferson City. We recognize this, which is why this special session is so short. Plus, all lawmakers are not scheduled to be at the Capitol for the duration. Essentially, the House will meet for a couple of days and the Senate will meet for a couple of days. Part of the special session is reserved for a technical session, which does not mandate everyone be in attendance. This cuts back on the number of staffers who have to be in the office and also keeps lawmakers' per diem (the amount of money they receive each day during session) as low as possible.

The scope of the special session is restricted to just these two items, which means nobody can introduce legislation or debate items that are not related to state pensions or tax incentives for automobile manufacturers.

A special session is a rare occurrence, and is only done when pressing issues have to be addressed after the General Assembly adjourns in May. My hope is we do the work of the people and, no matter what we decide, make the best use of the taxpayers' money for folks throughout the state.

Senator Stouffer serves the counties of Carroll, Chariton, Cooper, Howard, Lafayette, Macon, Ray, Saline, and a part of Clay.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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