

State Senator
Gary Romine
Capitol Report



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Revitalizing the Lead Industry

Over the last year, I've worked on revitalizing Missouri's lead industry, an incredibly important part of our local and state economy. This session, I filed Senate Concurrent Resolution 19, which would extend the dissolution date of the Missouri Lead Industry Employment, Economic Development and Environmental Remediation Task Force.

This panel has worked hard over the last six months to find ways to breathe new life into an industry that could greatly grow the economy of our state, while protecting citizens. Technology has dramatically changed the way lead is mined and smelted. It can now be done with almost no risk to the public. It's time we move past the history of lead mining in this state and embrace its future.

One of the committee's main goals is bringing primary lead smelting back to not only our district, but the United States. There are currently none operating at this time anywhere in our nation. This is an incredible opportunity for our state to again be the main, perhaps only, provider of primary lead smelting in the country. I'm optimistic we can revitalize the lead industry in our state and create the jobs in our region that citizens need.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

Since first being elected to the Missouri Senate, one of my main priorities has been supporting education in the state, both K-12 and post-secondary. There are few things as important as providing a world-class education to Missouri students. These children will one day be the leaders of our state. Investing in their future is an investment in the future of Missouri. As the vice-chair of the Senate Education Committee, and the newly appointed chairman of the Joint Committee on Education, I'm proud to say we approved a number of measures this year addressing educational issues.

I was happy to see the Legislature provide more support to Missouri's technical colleges. As a former career tech teacher, I'm familiar with how these programs provide valuable educational opportunities to citizens. They are a huge benefit to our state and a critical part of training our state workforce.

This year, I sponsored Senate Bill 729, which creates a tax credit for companies that donate to innovation campuses, which have programs focusing on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). This incentive brings the business community into the state's efforts to keep our workforce competitive. And, it allows companies to donate to specific programs to train the employees they need.

In addition, I sponsored Senate Bill 782, which allows an individual with certification from the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence to obtain teacher certification in elementary

education. The bill would allow people who have earned a degree in another field to become certified as Missouri teachers with some continuing education.

In addition, we passed legislation that creates the Missouri Education Standards Working Groups, which will spend the interim collaborating to create educational benchmarks that best fit Missouri students through an open and transparent process.

In related news, I was honored to receive the distinguished legislator award this year from the Missouri Community College Association, a wonderful organization that promotes the importance of community colleges in Missouri. I've long been an advocate for diverse post-secondary options for Missouri students. The award validated those efforts, and I look forward to continuing to work with the MCCA in the future.

Criminal Code Reform

The Missouri Senate spent a great deal of time this session approving the first overhaul of our state's criminal code in more than 35 years. A lot has happened since then, from technological advances creating new crimes to changing cultural stances on current ones.

Over the last eight years, countless elected officials and legal experts have poured through our statutes and made recommendations on how to modernize the laws we live under. Those efforts culminated with us passing Senate Bill 491, which will give law enforcement officers and prosecutors the tools they need to keep Missourians safe.

With such a detailed bill, some were hesitant to approve it for fear of unintended consequences. However, the changes won't take effect for two years, giving us time to make any necessary changes. I was proud to be a part of such a historical undertaking.

Expanding Benevolent Tax Credits

Benevolent tax credits play a critical role in supporting non-profit organizations in our state, such as pregnancy resource centers and food pantries. These credits urge people to take ownership of their communities and help their friends and neighbors.

Unfortunately, the demand for the services provided by these organizations has never been higher. In an effort to ensure these groups have the money they need to carry out their important missions, I sponsored legislation this year to increase the cap on our benevolent tax credit programs.

I was disappointed to see House Bill 1132 vetoed, but proud to see it overridden. The bill increases the cap on the Pregnancy Resource Center, Food Pantry and Maternity Home tax credits so these non-profit organizations can continue providing much-needed services for Missouri citizens.

Providing Broad-Based Tax Relief

Since the 2008 recession, our economy has slowly recovered. Unemployment has fallen, new jobs are being created, and we continue to maintain our AAA bond rating. However, Missouri's growth continues to lag behind that of other states, including our neighbors. We've failed to implement any kind of major economic development measures in years. We continue the same policies, and we continue to see the same results.

What's especially frustrating is that many of the jobs created are going to metropolitan areas. While I appreciate those cities' status as economic engines in our state, I think too often we ignore the importance of small businesses like the ones in our area. We need to foster expansion in all areas of our state, both urban and rural.

This is why I supported the passage of Senate Bill 509 this session, a broad-based tax relief measure aimed at reducing the tax burden on all individuals and companies, especially small-business owners. It's the first significant tax cut in almost a century.

The bill will allow Missouri citizens and businesses to keep more of their hard-earned income. That money can then be reinvested in our economy through consumer spending, business expansion and job creation. The legislation goes far in creating an economic environment in our state conducive to long-term growth and prosperity.

However, to ensure we can continue supporting vital state services, like education, the bill includes a safety-net, preventing any of the tax cuts from taking place unless revenue collections grow substantially the previous year. This guarantees that these tax reductions don't cut into our general revenue fund. It's a moderate tax cut proposal that protects general services while providing relief to citizens and small businesses throughout the state.

PRESERVING THE SHARED-WORK PROGRAM IN MISSOURI



Shown above, Sen. Romine speaks on the Senate floor during the 2014 Legislative session.

Shared-Work is a federal program overseen by the Missouri Department of Labor. When business is slow, the program allows certain employers to reduce hours and give workers access to partial unemployment benefits. Last year, more than 30,000 workers were able to avoid layoffs by using the state aid to make up for reduced wages.

The program has been a success since first adopted in Missouri in 1987. It gives some companies the flexibility they need to retain a skilled workforce during economically challenging times, and prevents hard-working Missourians from losing their jobs. Due to new federal mandates, though, the program was in danger of being eliminated here in the state.

This year, the Legislature was successful in passing legislation to align state law with the federal standards, ensuring this important program continues to benefit Missouri employers. It also relieves financial pressure on our state's unemployment program, which has been heavily utilized since the 2008 crisis. The legislation was signed by the governor on July 1. The bill contained an emergency clause, taking effect upon receiving his signature. I'd like to thank the Missouri Chamber of Commerce for working with us to get this important measure passed.

Giving Property Owners All the Facts

Mining is a part of our state's history. The settlers who came to Missouri, specifically our area, were drawn to the abundant natural resources below their feet. In the centuries since, the mining industry has played an important part in our local and state economy.

However, the public's safety has to be our primary concern. One of the ways we ensure the public is part of the process is by requiring surface mine operators to send a notice of intent to property owners adjacent to a proposed site.

Many residents near a proposed surface mine last year were never informed of the project because the site boundary line for the mine was set a few feet behind the property line. In effect, this meant there were no "official" adjacent or contiguous property owners.

This isn't right. I support the mining industry in this state, but not before the health and livelihoods of my constituents. Residents have a right to voice their concerns regarding possible surface mines that could greatly affect their lives and their property.

To close this loophole, I filed Senate Bill 642, which would require proposed surface mining operations to contact all landowners within a half-mile. This guarantees that all citizens in the area are aware of what's taking place.

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Shown above, from right to left, is Sen. Romine's legislative staff: Dan Hutton, Legislative Director; Sen. Gary Romine; Karen Jacquin, Administrative Assistant; intern Lisa Rose from Missouri State University; and intern Kevin Abts from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

Working for Our District

As your state senator, I remain focused on moving our area forward by cutting through the bureaucratic red tape to get you answers from your state government. Some of the local issues we worked on this year included:

- Helping Paramount Embroidery locate a large facility in Ellington.
- Carrying a bill ceding state property to the City of Farmington.
- Fighting the National Parks Service's new draft management plan for the Ozark National Scenic Riverway.
- Assisting Mayor Bill Tidwell in laying the groundwork for a new drug education program in Annapolis.
- Helping the forest industry by having language added to my bill renewing the Wood Energy Tax Credit.
- Ensuring that Highland Healthcare in Reynolds County keeps the dental equipment it needs to provide dental services to children.

If you have an issue that needs to be addressed, don't hesitate to contact the office.