



SENATOR GARY ROMINE

3RD DISTRICT

2013 Capitol Report

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

It has been an honor serving as your state senator during my first legislative session in the Missouri Capitol. There were many challenges before us this year, but we never shied away from tackling difficult issues.

In this annual newsletter, you'll find information on some of the Legislature's major achievements, my legislative accomplishments for the year and new laws that will affect you and your family.

I always appreciate hearing your comments, opinions, and concerns. Please feel free to contact me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-4008, or visit my official Missouri Senate website: www.senate.mo.gov/romine. Thank you and God bless.

Sincerely,



Inside:

Training Missouri workers for 21st Century jobs.

Education update from the 2013 legislative session.

Measures to improve the lives of 3rd District residents.



Shown above, Sen. Gary Romine, with his legislative staff, Brad Green, Chief of Staff, and Karen Jacquin, Legislative Assistant.

Contact Sen. Gary Romine:

201 W. CAPITOL AVE., RM. 334
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101
(573) 751-4008
WWW.SENATE.MO.GOV/ROMINE

PROTECTING JOBS IN SOUTHEAST MISSOURI

During this year's annual veto session, the Legislature overrode 10 of the governors 29 vetoes. It was the highest number of overrides since the 1830s, when the Legislature was required to approve divorces. Among the bills we voted to enact into law was a measure critical to protecting more than 1,600 lead industry-related jobs in our area and the countless ancillary businesses supported by them. **House Bill 650** caps the amount of punitive damages plaintiffs can receive in lawsuits involving areas of the state, including the Old Lead Belt, which is located in St. Francois County. The bill only applies to punitive damages; compensatory damages, already allowed by law, would not be altered under the bill.

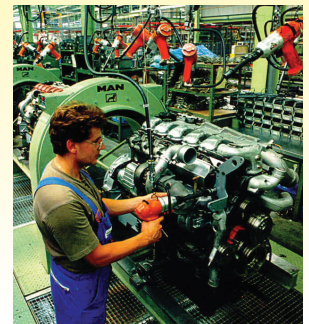
Without this measure, one of the last remaining lead mining companies in our country, which has made good faith efforts and spent tens of millions of dollars cleaning up chat and tailings impoundments left by generations of miners before, would have been bankrupted by lawsuits. This would kill the lead industry in Missouri and cost our area thousands of critical jobs. And, if the business had been allowed to fold, taxpayers would have been left paying for the remediation efforts. This legislation is a solid compromise that allows citizens the right to compensation in court while protecting a valuable business and industry in our state making every effort to fix problems it didn't create.

TRAINING MISSOURI WORKERS

Our economy is changing. We're increasingly moving toward more innovative and high-tech industries. It's important that we help Missourians secure these lucrative careers. Job creation is one of our top priorities, but it can't be the only one. We have to make sure Missourians have the skills they need to seize these opportunities and sustain long-term economic success.

House Bill 196, which contains a provision identical to legislation I filed, establishes the Missouri Works Training Program. The measure combines several existing programs to better provide job training assistance to qualified companies. This streamlines our training programs, making them easier to use, less bureaucratic and more business-friendly.

The bill also expands the number of organizations that qualify, adding technology centers created by community colleges and state-owned postsecondary technical colleges. Community colleges support the lion's share of these programs, so expanding eligibility to include them will allow countless more citizens to take advantage of valuable new work training.



A MODERN STATE GOVERNMENT

Eliminating waste and abuse in state government should be one of our constant goals as legislators. A large part of modernization is how we provide state services to taxpayers. We live in a changing world, where electronic devices and digital files dominate modern life. Our state government needs to keep up with those changes, not only to make state services more convenient to citizens, but also to get rid of outdated methods that waste state funds. I filed a handful of measures this session that seek to bring Missouri's government into the 21st Century.

Senate Bill 80 removes the requirement that the Missouri Board of Nursing Home Administrators notify applicants by mail when it is time for license renewal. Basically, this bill allows the board to use more modern means of notifying applicants, such as telephone calls and emails. It will also save the state money on unnecessary postage.

Senate Bill 317 allows motorists to provide proof of financial responsibility insurance with mobile electronic devices. In 2012, five states made the change to allow electronic proof of insurance. This year, Missouri joined those states by passing similar legislation. The bill simply modernizes state regulations and procedures to reflect our increasingly paperless world. It also increases efficiency in the system, which is a goal we should always be striving toward.

Senate Bill 339 modifies provisions relating to unemployment compensation.

Missouri is currently the only state in the country that still requires individuals seeking unemployment benefits to physically visit a career center every four weeks. It's an archaic requirement that places a huge burden on people, especially in our area, who often have to drive miles to get to a career center. By eliminating this requirement, unemployed individuals can save money on transportation costs; it also allows staff to focus on providing services for job seekers, such as one-on-one training and interview coaching.



“ANDY GAMMON MEMORIAL HIGHWAY”

I was honored this year to work toward passing legislation to honor local fallen worker Andy Gammon, a carpenter who lost his life while constructing the new Mississippi River Bridge in St. Louis.

Sometimes in our rush to pay tribute to our heroes, we forget about the normal, but no less heroic, people who surround us. Every day, countless Missourians work hard to take care of their families, to do the best job they can at work, to help their friends, to look out for their neighbors, to just be a good person. We might think of these tasks as mundane, but they're no less admirable than the efforts of a famous athlete or celebrity, and no less worthy of acknowledgment.

House Bill 303 contains a provision based on legislation I filed that will designate the section of I-70 that runs before and up to halfway across the new Mississippi River bridge, or the Illinois state line, the “Andy Gammon Memorial Highway.” There's nothing that can really lessen the grief of losing a loved one, but I hope Andy's family takes some small comfort in knowing his memory will live on through this designation.

Education Update

As a parent, a former teacher, and a citizen of Missouri, the education of our children is one of my highest legislative priorities. I was honored to be appointed as the vice chairman of the Senate Education Committee and a member of the Joint Committee on Education this session.



One of the largest tasks this year was crafting a higher education funding formula. The plan was the culmination of months of work and countless hours examining and studying higher education funding, not only in our state, but across the nation.

The final result was a comprehensive plan that would go far in ensuring higher education funding is divvied up equitably between our state's colleges and universities. While time ran out before a bill was passed implementing this new formula, we will almost surely be looking at it again next year.

It's important for us to find an equitable and fair way to distribute state funds to higher education institutions, and I will continue working with my colleagues on

both committees throughout the interim.

On a more positive note, the final budget for Fiscal Year 2014 included a more than \$60 million increase to the K-12 education formula, making it the largest education appropriation in the history of the state, and increased higher education funding by \$34 million, along with allocating more to scholarship programs.

If we truly wish to put our state on a path to prosperity, education must remain one of our highest priorities and an area we constantly analyze to find improvement.

BUILDING A LEAD INDUSTRY IN MISSOURI

This year, I was appointed chairman of the Missouri Lead Industry Employment, Economic Development and Environmental Remediation Task Force, which was established by Senate Concurrent Resolution 15. The task force is charged with making recommendations to the General Assembly on ways to promote and develop a clean lead industry in Missouri and examine the economic impact of such an effort. The group will also examine remediating environmental settlements.

We obviously now know the dangers of using lead in consumer products and how harmful the waste from lead mining can be, and we will never allow something like that to happen again. But the lead industry has changed drastically in the last 30 years. We've learned how it can be used safely, such as in industrial parts and the casting of metals. And, lead can now be mined in a way that poses next to no health risks for workers or nearby communities.

Lead is still an incredibly valuable resource and remains in high demand throughout the world. Missouri has a natural abundance of lead, and is also home to the largest remaining lead producer in the Western Hemisphere. We're missing an incredible opportunity if we don't at least look at ways to encourage the growth of an environmentally responsible lead industry, which has the potential to create hundreds of jobs in southeast Missouri and promote economic development throughout the state.

The group will issue its recommendations to the General Assembly during the 2014 session.

SECOND INJURY FUND FIX

One of the Missouri Senate's highest priorities this session was addressing the insolvency of the state's Second Injury Fund (SIF). **Senate Bill 1**, signed by the governor, modifies provisions related to the SIF and workers' compensation. Under the bill, the surcharge rate which funds the SIF would increase in instances of a shortfall. The rates would return to normal on Dec. 31, 2020, unless the deficit is paid off early. The legislation also removes partial disabilities from the fund, a move that will eliminate 70 percent of claims alone.

As a business owner, I understand how important it is that we find a solution to this problem. Employers and workers across the state deserve a level of security when dealing with the state's SIF and workers' compensation system. This bill will go far in giving them that.

Protecting Our Communities

The safety of our citizens should always be of our highest concern, which is why I filed legislation this year to increase cooperation between local and state law enforcement agencies. **Senate Bill 188** requires the local prosecutor to receive a copy of the petition for the conditional release of a sexually violent predator in his or her jurisdiction. A number of officials and law enforcement personnel are already notified when sexually violent offenders are released; this would simply add local prosecuting attorneys to the list. With St. Francois County being home to one of the state's sexual offender units, it is only right to notify and include our local officials in these proceedings. This simple measure will go a long way to ensure that conditional releases are done in a safe and prudent manner on behalf of our communities.

Also included in the bill is a provision identical to legislation I filed which allows certain law enforcement agencies to access monitoring information for sexually violent predators who are electronically tracked while on conditional release.

Missouri's Benevolent Tax Credits

Senate Bill 20, which I co-sponsored, renews and extends the sunset on a number of benevolent tax credit programs, including the Food Pantry tax credit and the Pregnancy Resource tax credit. These programs play an important role in helping charities and non-profit organizations provide critical services to Missouri families.

I was excited to see the measure move through the legislative process so quickly and signed by the governor. It's important we encourage Missourians to help their fellow citizens, which is what these credits do.

