

Schaaf named legislator of the year

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The speaker of the Missouri House of Representatives has named a St. Joseph doctor as legislator of the year.

Rep. Dr. Rob Schaaf, R-St. Joseph, received the honor for his involvement in the passage of MO HealthNet, a program that will replace Medicaid when it sunsets in 2008.

"I was knocked off my feet. I could hardly believe it," Dr. Schaaf told the News-Press.

Mr. Jetton announced his pick last month to House Republicans during an emergency caucus meeting after legislators adjourned the 2007 session, but he didn't make the news public until recently. House communications staff said Mr. Jetton has never before been named a legislator of the year.

"Rob is one of the most intelligent and hardworking legislators in the House and his work on the MO HealthNet legislation was nothing short of outstanding," Mr. Jetton wrote in a statement to the media. "This was one of the biggest and most important pieces of legislation that we have dealt with in a very long time and Rob handled it with grace, integrity and with much attention to the necessary details to create a successful system."

Senate Majority Floor Leader Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, authored the bill that enacted MO HealthNet, while Dr. Schaaf, the chairman of a health care facilities committee, carried it on the House floor.

Tense, late-session negotiations between the two stirred up concerns over the bill's passage. Legislators ultimately stripped the bill of several prevention and wellness concepts from the Senate. Dr. Schaaf and other House members tout their additions, which included a physician reimbursement increase schedule and the restoration of dental and optometry services to patients.

"I think (Dr. Schaaf) was instrumental in getting the bill through the House," Mr. Shields said. "I think the problems we initially had were with the House's understanding of the bill."

Democratic Caucus Chair Rep. Ed Wildberger, D-St. Joseph, like all but one House Democrat, didn't vote for MO HealthNet, pointing to a rushed legislative process and the inability of the bill to increase eligibility to the health care program. Final consideration of the bill didn't come until May 18, the last day of session.

Mr. Wildberger said House Democrats will vote for their legislator of the year in late July during a caucus meeting.

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