U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson announced today that her service in the House of Representatives will end in February 2013.

"The people of Southern Missouri have entrusted their voice in Congress to me for 16 years. Serving them is a humbling experience, a great honor and a welcome challenge. Our congressional district is big, it is diverse, and it demands practical representation by someone who places us and our home ahead of politics and partisanship. The people of our district demand results, they want us to work together, and they have every right to a representative who works as hard as they do. Every day in Congress, that is my goal.

"I am going to miss the constituents I work with every day, the thousands of small business owners, compassionate families, community leaders, students and servicemembers who define the character of Southern Missouri. My respect for them is boundless, and I will never forget the wonderful friendships I have gained through my service in Congress. The vitality of rural America depends on the hard work and optimism of the people who make their communities special. We are fortunate to have no shortage of that rare quality of American in Southern Missouri. And I plan to stay in Congress as long as I can to ensure the gap in their representation is as brief as possible.

"I am not leaving Congress because I have lost my heart for service -- to the contrary -- I see a new way to serve. I did not go seeking this opportunity, but I am excited about the new challenge it offers to find ways to promote strong rural policy.

"And I would be remiss if I did not also mention the dozens of staff members who have made helping our constituents their vocation. I have always had the very best staff in Congress, and people in Southern Missouri are truly fortunate that some of the best staff members and casework professionals in the country are working hard for them. Over the years, first Bill and then I have taken great pride in creating a strong legacy for Southern Missouri, for making sure Southern Missouri matters in Congress. Our district has earned its reputation for commonsense above all else, and I will leave Congress in February with a heavy heart despite my confidence that Southern Missouri and its standard for leadership will endure.

In February, Emerson will assume the role of President and Chief Executive Officer of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, where she will continue her advocacy for rural

communities in Missouri and throughout the country.