

Senator Chuck Gross

Results of the 2004 Questionnaire

STATE TAX CREDITS:

The state of Missouri has over fifty different tax credit programs costing roughly \$400 million per year. Many credits can be claimed for prior years, carried forward or sold to other entities. Credits against state tax liability are acquired in return for such actions as investing in select businesses, creating jobs in depressed areas, improving derelict properties, adopting special-needs children and contributing to projects undertaken by local non-profit organizations. Some tax credit programs have recently come under intense criticism for lack of accountability, misuse, obsolescence or fraud.

	Number	Percent
A. Providing tax credits to encourage economic development and social programs is good public policy and the state should increase the amount and availability of all such credits.	47	5.8%
B. Missouri needs to closely evaluate existing tax credit programs, retain only those that show a proven benefit, and implement tight accountability measures.	616	76.1%
C. Missouri cannot afford to be handing out tax credits and all of them should be revoked.	146	18.1%
Total response to this question:	809	100%

SCHOOL FUNDING PRESSURES:

The Missouri Constitution requires the state to provide annually not less than 25 percent of state revenue to the support of public schools. School districts also receive federal aid and local tax dollars. Actual total spending from all revenue sources for public elementary and secondary education in Missouri has risen from \$4.64 billion in 1993 to \$8.46 billion in 2003. Proceeds from riverboat gambling, lottery and bingo account for about 5 percent of total school funding statewide and are distributed through the foundation formula. State revenues account for an average of 39 percent of local school funding in St. Charles County. Depressed state revenues, effects of the foundation formula and withholdings by the governor have contributed to school districts receiving less money from the state this past year.

	Number	Percent
A. Funding pressures on districts should be eased by aligning state education standards to the federal standards, capping administrative costs and revising the foundation formula. In addition, the governor should be prevented from withholding excessive amounts from schools and instead make necessary cuts in other budget areas.	627	80.7%
B. The state should assume a greater burden for funding public education by raising taxes and cutting other state programs, such as social services and corrections.	36	4.6%
C. Taxpayers should assume a greater burden for funding public education through increased local school tax levies.	37	4.8%
D. I would like to see the current money shortages in education alleviated by tapping into the "Rainy Day Fund." I understand that this is a one-time fix and any shortages for the next fiscal year cannot be covered by the Rainy Day Fund.	77	9.9%
Total responses to this question:	777	100%

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TOLL ROADS:

With transportation needs outpacing available funding, it has been suggested that Missouri again consider toll roads. More than half the states in the nation have toll roads and/or toll bridges. There is currently only one toll bridge in Missouri, at the Lake of the Ozarks. Federal approval would be required to toll highways and bridges that receive federal funding.

	Number	Percent
A. I oppose toll roads and bridges. They are inconvenient, expensive and they slow traffic. Should Missouri need to generate additional transportation funds, I would prefer either a tax increase or cuts in other state services.	321	39.4%
B. I support toll roads and bridges in Missouri, but only for newly constructed roads or bridges, with the tolls ending once the bonds financing each project have been repaid.	302	37.1%
C. I support toll roads and bridges in Missouri as a means to increase transportation funding and to upgrade our major interstate without resorting to a tax increase.	192	23.5%
Total responses to this question:	815	100%

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has an audit policy to encourage regulated entities to make voluntary disclosures and promptly correct federal environmental violations. The incentive for business to self-report violations is to avoid excessive penalties, criminal prosecution and the associated high legal costs. Missouri law does not currently provide an incentive-based environmental audit policy for entities regulated by the Department of Natural Resources.

	Number	Percent
A. Missouri needs an environmental audit policy similar to the EPA's. It makes sense to provide incentives for business to be pro-active in environmental compliance, reducing enforcement costs to the state, lowering the cost of doing business and encouraging quick corrections to environmental problems.	510	65.1%
B. Missouri does not need an incentive-based environmental compliance program, but should continue its current regulatory program without changes.	171	21.8%
C. While I support a program to encourage voluntary compliance and prompt action on environmental violations, significant penalties should remain even though voluntary compliance rates may suffer and costs to government, business and consumers remain high.	103	13.1%
Total responses to this question:	784	100%

JUDICIAL SELECTION IN MISSOURI:

Under a non-partisan court plan, state court judges in St. Louis and Kansas City are appointed by the governor from a list of candidates selected by a commission comprised of a judge, two attorneys and two citizens. These appointed judges stand periodically for "retention," meaning voters choose to retain or remove them from office. Local judges in all other areas of Missouri are elected directly by the voters. A Missouri Supreme Court Justice has suggested that the non-partisan court plan be expanded to other areas of the state including St. Charles County.

	Number	Percent
A. I support expansion of the non-partisan court plan. Legal professionals and the governor do a better job of selecting judges than can the public. Insulating judges from the electoral process ensures judicial independence.	150	18.3%
B. The non-partisan court plan should be eliminated. Judges must be held accountable to the public they serve, and this is best accomplished in an election process whereby voters have the opportunity to assess judicial candidates through campaign debate and public scrutiny.	440	53.8%
C. No changes should be made to the state's judicial selection processes. While the non-partisan court plan appears to satisfy citizens in St. Louis and Kansas City, voters in the rest of the state including St. Charles County, should be allowed to select their judges through elections.	228	27.9%
Total responses to this question:	818	100%