



# WEEKLY REPORT

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## **MISSOURI GENERAL ASSEMBLY RETURNS TO STATE CAPITOL FOR THE 2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

State lawmakers returned to the State Capitol in Jefferson City on Wednesday to begin the Second Regular Session of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Missouri General Assembly.

By the opening day of session, lawmakers had introduced 315 bills and 16 resolutions. Last year, a session in which lawmakers had introduced a large number of bills, opening day brought 228 bills, indicating that this year could set a record for legislation introduced in our state.

The filing of bills in the Senate will continue until March 1. About a third of the bills introduced this year have already been assigned to committees. These committees will hold public hearings on bills.

Committee hearings are an important part of our state's legislative process. It is at committee hearings that citizens themselves can appear to testify for or against legislation, directly involving citizens themselves in our legislative process. If you wish to access a complete list of all the bills introduced and the schedule of committee hearings, you can find that information on the Senate website at [www.senate.state.mo.us](http://www.senate.state.mo.us).

Each year, lawmakers consider about 1,500 different bills and resolutions. While not all make it to the floor for debate by the full Senate, all are important. Under Missouri's Constitution, lawmakers will have about four and one-half months to review these measures before the Senate adjourns the Regular Session on May 14.

While Missouri has begun to emerge from our economic recession, the requests for funding for state programs and services will still exceed the amount of revenue our state is predicted to receive this year. Missouri has many budget safeguards, including a constitutional prohibition against deficit spending. This ensures that debates over state budget will require

lawmakers to make tough choices in determining how to best fund programs and services in our state.

Health care issues are expected to be debated by lawmakers this year. Enrollment in the state's Senior Rx program has not met expectations. At the same time, the federal government has enacted a prescription assistance program for older citizens. Lawmakers are expected to consider how Missouri's program might be modified to complement these new federal changes.

To help strengthen our state's economic recovery, lawmakers are likely to debate economic development and job creation proposals. This will include bond issues to help construct life science and agriculture research facilities on Missouri University campuses to strengthen our state's manufacturing sector with new, knowledge-based industries.

To make the most of available revenues, the General Assembly is expected to review the state's tax credit program to make sure tax breaks made available are carefully safeguarded.

Funding for schools is always an important issue to lawmakers, as are programs to ensure the security of the state and our citizens, as well as measures to protect natural resources, reduce illegal drug use and help create jobs for Missourians.

Clearly, much work lies ahead for state lawmakers as we begin this year's session of the Missouri General Assembly.

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