



MISSOURI SENATE  
JEFFERSON CITY

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A Weekly Column for the  
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## Senate Bill Speeds U.S. 67 Project

JEFFERSON CITY – Having begun last week, I and my colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee this week took public testimony on the remaining budget bills funding the state's programs and services. Traditionally, the public did not have an opportunity to express their views on state spending before the budget panel. (The budget meetings could be publicly attended, but no public comment period existed.) However, recognizing the merits of listening to ideas from people outside the capitol, and as the total state budget has come in at a substantial \$19 billion in recent years, we chose to actively involve the public this year.

Also heard this week in committee was a measure establishing the Missouri Biomass Technology Commission, which would be charged with identifying and aiding participation in alternative fuels market opportunities. Biomass commission membership would include directors from the state's agriculture, economic development and natural resources departments, along with private sector experts in business development and alternative energy research.

In remarkable speed, the full Senate this week approved legislation allowing the city of Poplar Bluff to put a ½-cent sales tax question to voters in April, rather than a later election day required by existing ballot deadline requirements. If approved, the added revenue would help widen U.S. 67 to four lanes from Poplar Bluff to Fredericktown.

Passed with an emergency clause that puts the bill into effect after House approval and the governor's signature (both actions are anticipated), the legislation also allows Cole County officials to push what would have been a special election for sheriff in March back to the standing municipal election date of April 5.

January is unusually early for the Senate to move bills to the House. The Senate's speedy action on Senate Bill 176 expedites a vote on funding a much-needed transportation project in our region, saves Cole County taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars and demonstrates the legislature's ability to quickly respond to constituencies.

I met this week with my Senate and House peers in a joint session of the legislature to hear the governor's State-of-the-State address and budget message. Governor Blunt detailed his wish to balance the state budget and increase school funding without raising taxes, and pledged to do so by reviewing tax policies and cracking down on waste, fraud and abuse in government.

As a member of the Senate's education and budget committees, I will be working closely with the governor and other groups invested in our public school system to ensure that every Missouri child has access to a quality, equitably funded education.

The governor also mentioned his commitment to legislation broadening the usage of advance voting, tracking the sale of over-the-counter cold remedies used in the production of methamphetamine and revising workers' compensation law.

In an effort to allow more Missourians to hear his message, Governor Blunt delivered his remarks to lawmakers in the evening – rather than the traditional morning delivery of previous years. A number of television and radio stations aired live coverage of the address, which I think was helpful for Missourians interested in hearing firsthand of plans for their state.

The Missouri Senate convenes again on Monday, January 31. Two days later, lawmakers will again meet in joint session to hear the transportation department's chief deliver his annual report.

*Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.*