



MISSOURI SENATE

Rob Mayer
25th Senate District

JEFFERSON CITY

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 331
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

A Column for the Week
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Contact: Irene Murray
(573) 751-3859

Budgeting for the Future

The \$19-billion budget balances education funding and health care concerns

JEFFERSON CITY – The current legislative session is winding down and, as a result, the minds of Missouri senators are turning toward the state budget, which must be approved by May 6. The details of the \$19-billion budget are laid out in 13 bills that must be deliberated by the Senate Appropriations Committee and then the full Senate. After the budget passed committee last week, it received Senate approval this week and was sent back to the House. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, I have taken an active part in debate and believe the budget we passed is the best possible plan for our available revenues.

Missouri's budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 is a plan both efficient and responsible. It strikes a delicate balance between adequate school funding and proper state-sponsored health care for those in need. Meanwhile, the plan provides for other vital interests of Missouri and its citizens.

As a result of the tough negotiations of the Appropriations Committee, we were able to pass a budget that restores approximately 30,000 Missourians to Medicaid rolls. Our budget plan offers greater Medicaid eligibility than the House proposal and is still able to increase funding for Missouri schools by \$70 million. Further, the budget makes funding increases for the Departments of Agriculture, Conservation and Public Safety. This budget furthers our commitment to Missouri students and protects against proposed cuts to our most vulnerable citizens.

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While we are moving forward on the budget, we have not forgotten about other important bills that have yet to be passed. Legislation making it more difficult for criminals to obtain the chemicals used to manufacture methamphetamine was passed by the House this week. Senate Bill 10, which I am co-sponsoring, limits the amount of some over-the-counter cold medicines customers can buy and requires pharmacists or licensed technicians to distribute those medications. The bill affects sales of medicines containing pseudoephedrine in tablet form while exempting liquid and gel-cap versions of the medications, which cannot be used for meth production. Limiting access to the forms of ephedrine used to manufacture this dangerous drug is a vital step in countering Missouri's meth plague. Senate Bill 10 has an emergency clause, which means it will take effect as soon as the governor signs it. There is a reason for this. Missouri's meth problem has reached epidemic levels. Immediate action must be taken, and this bill ensures that our communities will not have to wait for help in the battle against this destructive affliction.

Another bill I am co-sponsoring saves taxpayer dollars by removing restrictions on public works projects. Under Senate Bill 185, which is slated for initial approval in the Senate, city and county governments will no longer have to award public works bids to contractors who are affiliated with labor unions. This legislation will drive down the costs of public works projects by removing these burdens from local governments. In doing so, policies that discriminate against employers who choose not to affiliate with labor organizations will also be eliminated. The focus of this bill is fairness. It is fair to businesses, city and county governments, and taxpayers.

With the session coming to a close, my colleagues and I in the Senate are putting in overtime to ensure that every citizen in Missouri gets what it pays for – a fair deal from their government.

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