



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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School-Funding Success

Newly passed “foundation formula” will better provide for Missouri schools

JEFFERSON CITY – In the final week of the legislative session, an important bill changing the way we fund our public schools received final approval from the Missouri General Assembly. This legislation will fund Missouri school districts more equitably and guarantees that our schools will spend enough on students to provide them an adequate education.

As a member of the Senate Education Committee and the Joint Committee on Education, I have seen this bill develop and move through both chambers of the General Assembly. The benefits it will provide for Missouri schools are worth all the effort that went into getting this bill passed.

Our current funding system is badly in need of reform. It bases funding according to property values in each district and fails to account for the varying costs of living among districts. Per-pupil funding varies from \$5,000 to \$13,000 in Missouri school districts. However, our new formula determines a minimum per-pupil dollar figure needed to provide our students with an adequate education and adjusts funding according to our districts’ differing costs of living. This legislation will not reduce state education funds in any Missouri district and ensures that the buying power of Missouri districts will be equitable, though not necessarily equal in value. While we will increase school funding in our state by more than \$800 million over the next several years, indexing the dollar will save money for Missouri because our system will be fair and legally defensible.

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While we have successfully improved Missouri school funding, several key pieces of legislation I have sponsored were also approved in our final week. A bill expanding retirement benefits to members of the Missouri State Highway Patrol has received final approval by the Legislature. Senate Bill 317 allows all employees of the highway patrol to qualify for certain retirement benefits. Previously, only uniformed officers qualified for the benefits. This legislation sends a message that all members of our state police force deserve recognition for their contributions to the safety of Missouri citizens. We should not create divisions between members of our law enforcement community, and this bill ensures that everyone in this honorable group of people receives proper compensation for the sacrifices they make for our state.

I have sponsored another key bill that has been approved in our final week. Senate Bill 420 contains a variety of provisions relating to the safety of our children and other legal concerns. Under the legislation, courts will not be permitted to return children to homes in which the parents have been convicted of certain sexual offenses against children. This provision ensures that our children will not be reunited with the very people who have abused them or other children and sent them into the custody of the state. Also in the bill is a measure allowing courts to appoint standby guardians who temporarily assume the duties of a legal guardian. Another provision creates a task force that will draft a plan for alternative prison sentences for nonviolent offenders in order to slow the growth of our overburdened state prisons. These measures will make our children safer while creating a better-functioning legal system in Missouri.

In the First Regular Session of the 93rd General Assembly, we have made several important improvements to the State of Missouri. It has been a pleasure to serve all of my constituents during this session, and I can't wait until January to return to Jefferson City to continue to serve my constituents in the State Capitol. Meanwhile, I invite all of my constituents to contact me during the off-session with any and all concerns. I am always available for the people of Southeast Missouri. Thank you for your support.

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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.*