



A Budget Reflecting Our Priorities

Funding for Education, First Steps Program, and Parents as Teachers Increases

This week the legislature completed work on the budget for the state's upcoming fiscal year. The budget for the state of Missouri is contained in 13 appropriation bills, with each bill addressing a particular area of state funding such as highways and transportation, social services, elementary and secondary education, health and public health, etc. The legislature thoroughly considered the 13 appropriation bills throughout the week, balancing priority expenditures with available resources.

Each fiscal season we are faced with the challenge of spending within our means. The final \$19.2 billion budget that we approved increases state spending by 1.7 percent in comparison to last year. Inevitably there will have to be sacrifices in some area of spending, but lawmakers decided that the sacrifice will not come at the cost of education. My top priority is investing in securing a prosperous and vigorous future by sufficiently funding education. I feel strongly that providing ample resources for our children's education is necessary for Missouri's long-term vitality. To fully meet the needs of the education system, we boosted funding for elementary and secondary education by \$113 million. No amount of money will be cut from our state colleges and universities, as we protected their core budgets.

We further invested in our children by allotting \$26.1 million toward the First Steps program, an early intervention program for more than 8,000 children younger than 3 years old with developmental disabilities. More than \$3 million will be going toward the Safe Schools Initiative, which funds programs that address the needs of students with violent, abusive and disruptive behavior. Parents as Teachers, a program aiming to educate parents about the role they play in enhancing their children's development, will receive \$1 million more than it did last year with a total of \$31.3 million in funding.

Missouri's Medicaid program swelled beyond its scope over the past two gubernatorial administrations. This year we were faced with the very necessary, but very difficult decision of moving forward with a more fiscally responsible plan. The budget, which calls for a system of stricter eligibility verification and oversight, focuses the state's resources on Missouri's most needy and vulnerable. We will continue to provide services to more than 900,000 Missourians. In an effort to make Medicaid users become *active* participants, we made changes to Missouri laws that will now require nominal premiums

and co-pays. We also took steps to reduce the out-of-control growth in our Medicaid system by changing eligibility guidelines. This is a preventative step to spare Missourians from feeling the pain of even deeper cuts in years to come if the program continues on its current path to insolvency.

Our fiscal proposal for the Medicaid program allows disabled and elderly people to qualify for Medicaid as long as their incomes aren't more than 85 percent of the federal poverty level. This provision will ensure that only the people who truly need state-subsidized health care will receive it. We even removed \$2.3 million from funding various capital expenditures, such as constructing new state buildings, and put it toward providing personal assistants for severely disabled people. We were also successful in securing \$200,000 in funding for community-based autism research in Cape Girardeau. Additionally, we were able to secure funding for the Cottonwood Residential Treatment Center, which provides services for children ages 6 to 17 with behavioral and emotional.

The budget, which will soon go before the governor, conveys the value the state legislature places on the future of our children and the future of our state. The budget also expresses the utmost respect for Missouri by fulfilling our duties as declared in the state constitution and working according to the limitations imposed by citizens' request that we not raise taxes. This budget moves Missouri back to a solid financial foundation by eliminating our dependency on hundreds of millions of dollars in one-time funds used to pay ongoing costs. The bottom line is that we had difficult choices to make throughout this budget process, and we reached our decisions according to the priorities set by the people of the state of Missouri.

The governor must sign the budget before it goes into effect for Fiscal Year 2006, which begins July 1. The First Regular Session of the 93rd General Assembly adjourns next Friday, May 13th. The main issue that we will work to resolve during the last week is rewriting the foundation formula.

Contact Me

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions and concerns. Please feel free to contact me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2459. You may write to me at Jason Crowell; Missouri Senate; State Capitol; Jefferson City, MO 65101, or email me at: jcrowell@senate.mo.gov or visit me on the web at <http://www.jasoncrowell.com>.

Thank you for your time.

Senator Jason Crowell represents the people of Bollinger, Cape Girardeau, Madison, Mississippi, Perry and Scott counties in the Missouri Senate.