



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
Week of March 14, 2005**

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Mid-Session Review

JEFFERSON CITY – The mid-point of the First Regular Session of the 93rd Missouri General Assembly is a good place to reflect on what we have accomplished on behalf of the citizens of Missouri.

The 2005 session has presented us with great challenges and opportunities for Missouri citizens. We have achieved success in the areas of tort reform, workers' comp reform and Medicaid reform.

The tort reform bill which I sponsored in the Senate has been sent to the governor for his signature. Medical malpractice premiums have skyrocketed in the past four years in Missouri since a St. Louis judge effectively removed the cap from non-economic damages paid to victims of medical neglect. Missouri is known nationwide as a friendly place to bring lawsuits to St. Louis or Kansas City to get high jury awards. The Senate has approved legislation to limit personal injury lawsuits. The tort reform bill (HB 393) will restore caps on high jury awards, restrict liability when multiple defendants are held responsible for awards, and eliminate venue shopping.

Senate Bill 1 reforms Missouri's workers compensation system. The current system is not only twice the cost of similar coverage of nearly all the states around us, but it does not serve the injured worker well either. Many workers have fought the system for a number of years before receiving their proper compensation for permanent or partial permanent disabilities received on the job. The current system has strayed far from its original intent – to provide coverage both in lost wages and health care for a worker who has been injured on the job. Off-

job injuries, aging problems, and abuse of alcohol and drugs have contaminated a system with a good purpose. The skyrocketing cost off workers comp coverage is driving employers from the state or keeping them from moving to Missouri. The House and Senate have approved the workers' comp reform bill and sent it to the governor for his signature.

Missouri's Medicaid program is growing at a rate of 50,000 new people a year, costing an additional \$250 million a year. Over one million Missourians are on Medicaid (over one in five people) and we are currently spending more on Medicaid than on elementary/secondary schools. If we were to enact all of Governor Blunt's cuts without reforming the system, we would be back again at this same level in three years, and in four years would be an additional billion dollars in the red. The proposed cuts take us back to the level of services just two years ago. Changing an entitlement program is not easy, but it is absolutely necessary. SB 539 starts the reform process by making many of the guaranteed benefits subject to appropriation. This makes all programs compete when it comes to budget consideration and should improve the efficiency and effectiveness of each program. The bill also starts a year-long process to completely overhaul the delivery of Medicaid services to Missouri's poor citizens.

The Senate has approved the Medicaid reform bill and sent it to the House.

The General Assembly has adjourned for spring recess and will reconvene on Tuesday, March 29 at noon.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.state.mo.us

Senator Delbert Scott represents the people of Barton, Benton, Cedar, Dallas, Henry, Hickory, Pettis, Polk and St. Clair counties in the Missouri Senate.