



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Mid-Session Review, Part 2

JEFFERSON CITY – As we approach the second half of the First Regular Session of the 93rd Missouri General Assembly, it's time to take stock of what we have accomplished on behalf of the citizens of Missouri.

Legislators have been crafting a new school foundation formula that will provide students an equal base amount of state aid to ensure a quality education, regardless of where the child lives. The current proposal calls for a base amount of \$6,100 per student in each district. Negotiations are underway which, when approved, should call for an additional \$600 to \$700 million in new education dollars to be phased in over a three or four-year period.

I am sponsoring the Childcare Vision Act (SB214), which has been approved in committee and awaits action on the Senate floor. The goal of this act is to ensure detection of any eye disease or disorder at a more treatable age. It presents an opportunity to correct many vision problems in order to prevent a student from getting a bad start in school due to poor eyesight. This important legislation would require every child enrolled in kindergarten or first grade to receive a comprehensive eye examination by a state licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist beginning July 1, 2006. The legislation also establishes channels for those who cannot afford an eye exam to have that exam provided at no charge.

Senate Bill 270 includes a package of reforms and incentives to re-attract state deposits to Missouri banks. The act also would revitalize the state's linked deposit loan program to create jobs, help farmers and boost small business in Missouri. This is a win-win situation for all Missourians in which we take Missouri money and invest it in Missouri banks to loan out to

Missouri citizens to create jobs for Missourians. The Invest-In-Missouri Act modernizes security collateral requirements for state deposits so they are more like those used by federal banks, which levels the playing field between state and federal banks. The bill was passed by the Senate and awaits approval in the House.

One of the quiet assets of many communities is a sheltered workshop which provides employment for physically or mentally disabled persons who cannot hold a regular job because of their disability. The state of Missouri supports these workshops in an effort to give meaning and employment to those who cannot keep up with the pace of work because of their disability. It has been six years since the amount the state pays for each six-hour day has been raised. SB 173 would raise that rate from the current \$13 to \$18 over a three-year period, subject to appropriation. The bill has been approved by the Senate.

It is necessary for the legislature to make some very difficult decisions this year due to the state's financial problems. The Missouri Constitution requires the legislature to submit a budget to the governor. While many leading economic indicators project favorable revenue growth, some estimates show a budget deficit of more than \$300 million for the 2005-2006 cycle, due in large part to one-time funding mechanisms used over the past two budget years. Governor Blunt reiterated his objective of balancing the state budget and increasing school funding without raising taxes by revising Medicaid eligibility policies, reducing the state workforce and cutting waste, fraud and abuse in government. The budget process is just beginning. Lawmakers must complete work on the state budget by the end of the first week in May.

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

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,
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