



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the  
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# General Assembly Passes Budget

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JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri General Assembly passed the budget for fiscal year 2006 this week and sent it to the governor for final approval. The \$19.2-billion budget, which is contained in House Bills 1 through 13, comprises estimated appropriations and revenues for the fiscal year beginning July 1 of this year.

Senators moved the budget to the governor more than a full day ahead of the constitutional deadline, May 6, a remarkable achievement rarely reached in past sessions.

The Department of Social Services leads all state departments in funding with \$5.96 billion, while the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is second with \$4.84 billion in spending. Funding increases have been budgeted for the agriculture and labor departments, the Department of Economic Development and K-12 education, among other departments.

There has been a lot of cooperation this year between the governor's office and the House and Senate, working together through a very tough budget process. We completed work on the state budget ahead of schedule, beating the constitutional deadline by a day.

The most difficult issue this year was Medicaid. We're actually going to spend \$70 million more on Medicaid compared to last year to provide health care and mental health services to Missouri's senior citizens, disabled, working parents and children. In addition, beginning in July, a legislative commission will launch a year-long study on how to create a Medicaid system that works.

The 13 bills that make up the state budget include a \$113 million dollar increase for elementary and secondary education. From the time Governor Blunt started campaigning, he promised to make public education the number one priority. That is reflected in this budget with a large increase in funding for the school foundation formula. Funding for higher education will remain at the same level as last year.

We also restored full funding for the First Steps program offering early intervention services to 8,000 developmentally disabled infants and toddlers, and continued funding for one of the nation's most expansive children's health insurance programs covering children in families who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but can't afford private health insurance.

Lawmakers have continued to make value-added crops a priority in this budget cycle. We've increased ethanol subsidies by \$2.6-million with the intent of trying to wean Missourians off of foreign oil. It just makes sense to power our vehicles with crops that we grow, especially in light of today's high fuel prices.

There are still a number of issues to be resolved in the final week of the legislative session. The most important task will be completing work on a new school funding formula. Legislation rewriting Missouri's education funding formula has received committee approval in the House and awaits a final House vote before it is ready to be sent to the governor. Senate Bill 287, which was approved by the House Special Committee on Education Funding, works to create a more equitable system for distributing education funds and moves the current program from one driven by property tax rates to a system based on differing needs of school districts. The new foundation formula applies a minimum per-pupil dollar figure for the state and adjusts the figure according to varying property values and costs of living for each school district.

The First Regular Session of the 93<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly ends May 13.

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](mailto: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.*