



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Health Insurance Benefits

JEFFERSON CITY – The use of tobacco products exacts a high price in terms of illness, lost productivity, health care costs and premature death. In Missouri, more than 10,300 people die each year as a result of cigarette smoking. That amounts to 28 deaths each day or one Missourian every hour dying from the use of tobacco.

Missouri has taken important steps to prevent children from taking up the habit, while working to reduce the number of young people and adults who use tobacco products. Just last month, Governor Blunt announced a statewide tobacco quitline for Missourians who want to quit smoking and using other forms of tobacco (1-800-QUIT-NOW).

Research shows that one-half of the state's 1.1 million adult smokers have tried to quit at least once during the last year. Other states using the service report the quitline program has helped thousands kick the habit, saving lives and money.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services reports the health care, disability, lost productivity and revenue costs associated with tobacco use amount to \$415 million in state Medicaid costs and \$1.7 billion in total medical costs.

In an effort to encourage more Missourians to kick the habit, the General Assembly approved legislation this year that rewards employers for hiring workers who do not smoke or use other tobacco products. House Bill 596 allows an employer to provide or contract for health insurance benefits at a reduced premium rate for employees who do not smoke or use tobacco products.

Missouri currently has one of the nation's highest rates of adult smokers at 26.5-percent. HB 596 is another important step in the effort to reduce tobacco use in Missouri.

Tobacco use prevention is good public policy that will reduce the burden of tobacco use, and good fiscal policy that will help solve the state's budgetary challenges by reducing the enormous costs of treating smoking-related diseases.

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.