



Week of January 31, 2005

## Beyond the Bottom Line

In his State of the State address last week, Governor Matt Blunt outlined his budget plan for the upcoming fiscal year. He wants to make some bold moves to keep state expenses under control. My fellow lawmakers and I are faced with the opportunity to set a tone of efficiency for state government spending in the years to come.

Missouri's horizon looks favorable in terms of revenue growth, but as the governor's proposed budget stands, we are some \$300 million short. That means that \$300 million worth of programs and expenses need to be cut, or that much money needs to be raised by way of taxes. The governor, having heard the voices of voters, is adamantly against raising taxes and instead is in favor of streamlining some of Missouri's programs and services.

To many, this seems harsh. But significant belt-tightening is needed so that Missourians continue to be well-served, well-educated and fairly taxed. Governor Blunt's approach to the unbalanced budget involves increasing school funding by strengthening oversight of our state's Medicaid program.

Currently, one of every four dollars of the state's \$19-billion budget is spent on Medicaid. There's no question that Medicaid is valuable in its goal of helping those who do not have access to health care, but there are areas of the program's implementation that need to be tweaked. Eligibility requirements need to be reviewed to ensure that those who the system is designed to help are in fact helped. Missouri's money should not be spent on

Medicaid benefits for those who are not citizens of this state, nor should we spend money on those who aren't even citizens of this nation. We don't know how many will for sure be affected by these proposed reforms because there aren't any eligibility verification processes in place, which is something that needs to be changed.

When it comes to the state of our transportation system, I am optimistic because the outlook is promising. We have had a rough start in generating revenue to put towards these safer, smoother roads that everyone wants, but the past two years have brought with them a few advancements as well. New MoDOT leadership and a new approach have put our wheels on the road to a better highway system. With the passing of Amendment 3 this past November, reforming our transportation system is now possible because there will be more money to work with. Taxpayers' confidence in MoDOT will return once they see that broken promises are a thing of the past.

To update you on some of my own legislation, I will be putting Senate Bill 50 before a public hearing on Mon., Feb. 7. The House sponsor of this bill, Rep. Maynard Wallace, will hold a hearing on Tues., Feb. 8. This measure would require people to prove they are U.S. citizens before they can register to vote to prevent voter, and in some instances, benefit fraud. I will keep you posted on how that bill progresses, as well as how the governor's budget proposals fare in the near future.

-END-

*Sen. Larry Gene Taylor represents the people of Ozark, Stone, Taney, Lawrence, Barry and McDonald counties.*