

State Senator

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Looking Ahead

JEFFERSON CITY – After a week-long recess, my fellow lawmakers and I are rejuvenated and ready to mirror the first half of session's success in the second half. The Senate has filed nearly 600 measures. Four bills have cleared both chambers of the Missouri General Assembly and have already been signed into law by Governor Blunt, three of which are important to our district. Southwest Missouri State University will be renamed Missouri State University in August, our system of civil liability will no longer push businesses and doctors out of state and sweeping reform has improved Missouri's workers' compensation system.

As the curtain rises on part two of session, we lawmakers are turning our attention to other legislative priorities such as educational funding and budget planning. A bill aiming at equitably distributing funding to Missouri public schools was voted out of the Senate Education Committee this week.

The current foundation formula allocates state money according to property values and taxes in each of Missouri's 524 school districts. Under SB 287, each school district would be guaranteed a base amount of approximately \$6,100 per pupil. Because the cost of education, much like the cost of living, varies dramatically between districts, the plan also implements a value index to take purchasing power disparities into account. This legislation is the product of collective efforts to address the problems of our current public school funding method. The bill now heads to the Senate floor for debate by the full body.

Another legislative issue my fellow lawmakers and I will be dealing with in the upcoming weeks is writing the state's budget. I will try to put a complex issue as simply as possible.

Missouri has \$19.2 billion to spend. However, to continue funding the state at the same level it is

now, we need almost an additional \$1.3 billion. There are only two ways in which to prevent Missouri's balance from dipping into the red. One is to raise taxes; the other is to cut programs. Since people have said "NO" to a tax increase three times in recent years, we are left with no other choice but to curb expenses in areas such as departmental administration and Medicaid. Even after the proposed cuts go through, we are still spending more on Medicaid this year than we did last year. We are fully considering all ways in which to erase fraud, waste and abuse from state government spending.

I will not deny that writing a balanced budget is a difficult and oftentimes contentious process. To truly tackle the state's out-of-control budget and spend money within Missouri's means, challenging decisions must be made. I will do my best to look out for the taxpayer by doing what we can with the available resources, while thinking in terms of which expenditure-trimming will have the least negative impact on Missouri citizens in the long-run.

My Senate and House colleagues and I want to reflect our priorities as lawmakers and as citizens of Missouri in our fiscal appropriations. For now, the area we feel is the most important one on which to focus is that of public education. Our children's education is worth investing in, because it secures prosperity for our future in terms of society, economy, science and—most importantly—the family.

As is typical, the fiscal plan is currently being deliberated in the House Budget Committee. Once the House drafts the legislative package detailing the appropriations, the Senate will similarly consider the bills.

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