

State Senator

Larry Gene Taylor

District 29

Room 426
State Capitol, Jefferson City, MO 65101

Phone: 573-751-9806 Toll-Free: 888-537-2900 Fax: 573-751-2451



Week of May 9, 2005

Wrapping Up a Productive Session

JEFFERSON CITY— The last two weeks of session have been devoted to tying up loose ends on priority bills that we wanted to get passed before the curtain falls on May 13. A week ago we brought to a close the budget-writing process. After hours of deliberation, we sent a \$19.2-billion budget to the governor one day before May 6, which is the deadline set by the constitution. Missouri's current financial situation called for a budget that more adequately funds public schools, reins in over-spending on social programs, all while protecting the state's most needy citizens. We answered that call to the best of our abilities.

Our budget balances our priorities without having to raise taxes. Because education remains a top priority on our legislative agenda, we directly added more than \$100 million to the elementary and secondary education budget and prevented cuts to higher education. This is indicative of the value we place on securing a promising future for our state through committing the appropriate resources to invest in Missouri's future. The governor must sign the budget before it goes into effect for Fiscal Year 2006, which begins July 1.

The most pressing issue this week was undoubtedly rewriting Missouri's public school funding formula. No lawmaker contested that we currently have a flawed "foundation formula," the complex equation used to calculate how much state aid goes to each public school district. But ever since nearly half of Missouri's public school districts filed suit against the state for allegedly having an unfair school-funding system, the need for a revised formula has been emphasized.

Senate Bill 287, which revamps the state-fund distribution method for Missouri's 524 public schools, calls for distributing state money according to student needs rather than local property values, as the current formula does. The school-funding measure sets a \$6,117 minimum amount of spending for each student in the state.

The new formula also secures extra funding for some urban school districts to cover the higher costs of labor in metropolitan areas and offers smaller districts access to a \$15-million grant funds for rural-

specific needs. The House and Senate agreed to a final version of the plan and once the governor signs the bill, it will go into law.

I successfully added an amendment onto an omnibus crime bill to protect a cornerstone of the democratic process—the right to vote. Now, when people register to vote, they must prove they are U.S. citizens. The current lax registration requirements undermine what Americans have fought long and hard for. It just does not make sense that you have to prove you are 18, and you have to prove you reside in Missouri, but you do not have to prove that you actually are a citizen of the very country that gives you the right to vote.

This amendment guards against un-American political groups that aim to sway our national elections. It also protects against identity theft and taxpayer abuse. Citizens of this great country have a stake in the defense of our country, the promotion of our ideals and hopes and the future of our children. It is the duty of elected officials—lawmakers, county clerks, the secretary of state—to prevent the demise of American integrity, sovereignty and security. Thanks to Senator Gary Nodler, who co-sponsored this provision, and Representative Maynard Wallace, who handled the measure in the House, this meaningful piece of legislation is on its way to the governor.

Although this is the last week of the First Regular Session of the 93rd General Assembly, our work as lawmakers extends throughout the year. Please feel free to contact my office with any questions or concerns at (573)751-9806.

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