



MISSOURI SENATE  
JEFFERSON CITY

Pat Dougherty  
4<sup>th</sup> Senate District

CAPITOL BUILDING, ROOM 333  
JEFFERSON CITY, MO 65101

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**Contact: Vicky Niekamp**  
**(573) 751-3599**

## Sen. Dougherty Sponsors Legislation Protecting Consumers From Ripoff

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*Measure Stops, Reverses Damage Caused by Measure Hastily Rammed Through in 2005*

JEFFERSON CITY – State Sen. Pat Dougherty, D-St. Louis, today announced he is sponsoring legislation reversing a 2005 measure that irresponsibly allows Missouri public utility providers to unfairly slap a surcharge on customers who are already near the breaking point shouldering an ever-growing load of living expenses not seen by previous generations. Dougherty’s legislation will restore protection for Missouri families working to make a better life. “In these times of skyrocketing natural gas prices, consumers and families need Protection, NOT punishment,” said Sen. Dougherty.

SB 179 allows Missouri’s energy watchdog, the Public Service Commission, to adopt rules giving utilities more leeway in passing on costs to customers. But what part of that bill really does is to slap a surcharge on families for trying to save energy. Sen. Dougherty’s bill invalidates a big-corporation-friendly/consumer-unfriendly provision in the bill that penalizes frugality and conservation.

“The Public Service Commission is in place to protect and serve the energy consumer, not to enable ill-gotten, windfall profits for big energy providers,” Dougherty said. “I will not stand idly by and watch as utility companies punish their customers for conserving our precious resources and charge their customers for trying to save money and energy. Returning the Public Service Commission to the public begins today. Restoring protection for Missouri families starts today.”

Sen. Dougherty said one such protection involves blocking natural gas utilities from trying to recapture any profits lost due to energy conservation efforts put in place by their customers by actually charging these customers for the saved energy.

“Natural gas rates are expected to jump more than 40 percent this year – more than 75 percent in some parts of the nation,” Dougherty said. “Naturally, faced with these dire predictions, consumers are doing their best to absorb the extra shock through energy conservation efforts. And they’re doing what’s right, too, as conservation saves precious natural resources, as well as reducing the monthly heating bill. Or at least conservation is *supposed* to lower bills. But under the provision passed last year, those reducing gas usage by lowering thermostats or adding insulation could have their efforts punished with spurious surcharges and boosted rates. Where is the logic in this? Where is the commonsense, *the decency?*”

Sen. Dougherty noted that families are facing rising costs across the board and don’t need the added challenge of trying to pay utility bills that seem to double each month.

“Insurance rates are soaring, gasoline is out of sight and the price of other necessary staples for today’s living are becoming more insurmountable each day,” Sen. Dougherty said. “And on top of all these challenges, lawmakers pave the way for utility companies to heap outrageous natural gas bills on the backs of their customers? This is an outrage and I’m doing something about it. Good public policy demands a repeal of this reprehensible bill of goods. My legislation protects Missouri families so they can comfortably, safely and affordably live in their homes at this unprecedented time of plummeting temperatures and soaring energy costs.”

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