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Sen. Dougherty closes career doing what he's done best: Fighting for improved health care coverage

JEFFERSON CITY – “Appropriate” was the word used by many to describe the last bill passed by the Missouri Senate on May 12. It was also the last bill passed by Senator Pat Dougherty (D-St. Louis) in his 28-year legislative career, and it was a subject – health care – with which he has become synonymous.

“It was entirely appropriate that Pat passed the clinical trials coverage legislation,” said Maryann Coletti of the Siteman Cancer Center. “He has been a constant battler for better health care coverage for Missourians his entire career.”

Coletti, an RN and Patient Advocate at Siteman noted that the bill (SB 567), “is an access to care issue for many cancer patients, and now they will reap the benefits of this important legislation.” Dr. Timothy Eberlein, the director of Siteman at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, also had high praise for the new law.

“Phase II Clinical Trials are the backbone for improving cancer care in this country,” Dr. Eberlein said. “The recent passage of SB 567 will allow more Missourians to have access to treatments designed to improve the standard of cancer care.”

SB 567 expands insurance coverage by requiring health insurance companies to provide coverage for patient-care costs incurred as a result of phase I or II clinical trials undertaken to treat cancer. Previously, only coverage for phases III and IV was required by law.

“The American Cancer Society considers this legislation an important victory in the fight against cancer,” said Matthew Farlin of the cancer society. “We will miss Sen. Dougherty’s leadership on issues related to cancer and hope his legacy will live on through the countless lives which will be saved in Missouri by this legislation.”

The law also requires health insurers to charge only one co-payment on a prescription if the required single dosage is not available and a combination of dosage amounts must be dispensed to fill the prescription. The bill also offers more flexibility to employers when it comes to health care coverage. Currently, employers may provide or contract for health insurance at a reduced premium rate for employees who do not smoke or use tobacco

products. Now, those employers will be able to provide or contract for health insurance at a reduced deductible level for those employees.

“This legislation may have been the last of my career and the last in the 2006 session, but it is well worth the wait for cancer patients in Missouri,” Sen. Dougherty said. “We have expanded access to health care by making clinical trials more accessible. We will be giving more and more Missourians real hope by advancing life-saving treatments and drugs. This is what good public policy is all about.”

For more information on SB 567, visit www.senate.mo.gov/dougherty.