



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 431 Jefferson City, MO 65101

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Contact: Todd Scott
(573) 751-1464 / (888) 711-9278

Legislation Requiring Accountability from State Government is Model for Stopping Runaway Growth

As the General Assembly works to pass the budget for Fiscal Year 2007, which begins July 1, we are once again confronted with the ongoing battle to keep state government from growing beyond its means — ultimately increasing the burden on taxpayers. The growth in our government has to be curbed for the health of our state and for the sake of Missouri families.

Three years ago, my colleagues and I approved SB 299. This bill reverses a trend that allowed government programs to live far beyond their usefulness and become bloated and ineffective. SB 299, which is now law, establishes performance-based budgeting and “sunset” requirements, establishes a Sunset Commission to review state agencies and programs and recommends ways to streamline state government and eliminate overlap and duplication of services. The measure cost virtually nothing to implement and will save millions of taxpayer dollars for Missourians by creating more efficiency in government. Simply stated, it puts the burden back on the bureaucrats to justify their programs and sets up a system to weed out government waste.

Under the law, each new program enacted into law “sunsets,” or ends, after a period of not more than six years. It also requires government officials to justify continued funding. A program can then be reauthorized for a period of up to 12 years if the Legislature deems it to be worthy of such an extension. If the program has not proved its worth to the Legislature it is automatically terminated.

The sunset law requires that two years before a program is scheduled to sunset, the agency responsible for administering the program is required to submit to the Joint Committee on Legislative Research information stating why we continue to need the program.

The committee then holds public hearings and issues a report to the General Assembly with recommendations on whether the program should continue, be reorganized, sunset or be consolidated. Ultimately, this law requires the state to review programs to ensure they are still effective and efficient.

State expenditures are growing too quickly. The budget currently under debate has grown to \$22 billion. Missouri families have to live within their means, and it is time that the state of Missouri learns to do the same.

The General Assembly has taken drastic steps to curb unsustainable growth, and we must continue that effort each year. We cannot sit idly by and allow the state to spend itself into a hole. This law is a step in the right direction towards reigning in the runaway inflation in the budget, and I am proud to support it.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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