



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

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

Column for Week of:
May 1, 2006

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

As the Economy Improves, Checks on Government Spending Must Follow

Last week in this column, I discussed legislation that requires accountability of Missouri government to ensure our tax dollars are not being wasted. This week I want to discuss another plan to help protect taxpayers from being required to give up more of their paychecks to fund the expansion of government programs. This is a system to require the state to save money for a rainy day.

Government growth is an important topic for me, because without measures in place forcing the state to justify its use of taxpayer dollars, governments tend to expand as much as they are allowed. With Missouri's stagnant economic picture over the past several years, we have not had to worry about that as much as in years past since state revenues were tight. However, with our economy picking up, I want to ensure our state does not revert to past bad habits as revenue begins to flow into state coffers at an increasing rate.

In the 1990s, Missouri and much of the rest of the United States saw vigorous economic growth. As such, there was more tax revenue available, and every dollar was spent, as governments tend to do. Although state programs saw unprecedented growth in enrollment and spending throughout the '90s, when economic activity slowed, Missouri had to tighten its belt and rein in spending.

However, there are signs that Missouri's economy is again on the upswing. And as one would expect, the threat of irresponsible tax and spending plans to create or expand government programs are reemerging.

I am very concerned about this tendency. I believe we need to instill a climate of government restraint. Last year I sponsored, and next session will refile, a resolution to implement the Missouri Savings Plan.

The initiative would have moved a percentage of revenue surpluses into the savings account to use in years of budget shortfalls. In other words, the bill proposed to smooth out the peaks and valleys that characterize our economy and, in turn, our revenue picture. Missouri families must save for a rainy day in case there are unexpected expenses, and the state should do the same.

It is natural for a government, with all of its departments and layers of bureaucracy, to try to expand, even at the expense of taxpayers. To temper that expansion, common-sense restrictions need to be in place. Missouri needs greater checks on governmental growth in times of economic expansion, because the bill for runaway government spending is always paid by the taxpayers.

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.

-END-