



SENATOR MATT BARTLE

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

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Unleashing a Government Watchdog

The State of Missouri is like a very large corporation. It has thousands of employees, hundreds of programs and a budget of well over \$ 20 billion. In any organization of this magnitude, and especially one spending the taxpayer's money, it is absolutely critical that we maintain fiscal discipline and monitor programs to make sure that state resources are not wasted. A government that becomes bloated and wasteful inevitably requires more funding, leading to increased taxes on its citizens. However, a little known office tucked away on the first floor of the capitol is working to cut out waste.

Over the past several weeks I have discussed my efforts to keep our government from growing out of control. This week I want to highlight an important part of the effort to maintain vigilant oversight of the myriad programs operated by the State of Missouri by discussing the efforts of a group of dedicated public servants who work for the Missouri General Assembly. This team of employees staffs the Fiscal Oversight Division of the Joint Committee on Legislative Research. This committee is made up of an equal number of senators and representatives chosen from their respective bodies. Its most prominent function is to hire staff to draft bills, do legal research and prepare the statute books, but a lesser known function is to root out government waste.

For several years, I have served as a member of the Joint Committee on Legislative Research, and every year the committee directs the Oversight Division to examine selected state programs in an effort to streamline their activities and root out wasteful spending. The division independently examines agency records, interviews staff, surveys affected citizens, observes operations and reviews similar programs in other states. Oversight employees work to determine the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of government programs and investigate funding levels and spending practices. Often these reviews lead to recommendations to the Legislature for changes that could be made to enhance a particular program or make it more efficient.

Notable examples of the success of these program reviews by the Fiscal Oversight Division include the discovery that 325 state employees were getting benefits under both the taxpayer-subsidized, state-run health-insurance program and the Medicaid program. Stopping this double-dipping saved the taxpayers \$1.8 million. It was also discovered that some people who didn't even live in the Show-Me State were getting benefits under the Missouri Medicaid program. Next week I will talk about more examples of the success of this program, but suffice it to say that the examples of waste that my colleagues and I have seen assure us that these evaluations are extremely important in helping make sure that state government operates efficiently.

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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