

Report from Senator David G. Klindt

April 20, 2006

Fully funding education

The Missouri Senate this week passed its version of the state operating budget with a big emphasis on improving public education – our state’s top priority.

The Senate version includes an additional \$142 million for elementary and secondary education, including an extra \$15 million for the Small Schools Grant program, which is especially important to rural areas. We also added an additional \$1.6 million for the popular First Steps Program and an increase of \$1 million for Parents as Teachers.

The increase in spending for education fully meets our obligations to fund the new foundation formula we passed last year. In total, our spending on elementary and secondary education in the next fiscal year will **exceed \$5 billion.**

Other budget highlights include a 52 percent increase in funding for highways and transportation. The huge increase is due mostly to the transfer of funds mandated by the people in the passage of Amendment 3. We’re spending more and more of our fuel taxes directly on transportation – just as we should.

The budget also includes money to operate a website that will allow all Missourians to easily “comparison shop” for prescription medicines. The prices pharmacies charge for the 50 most commonly used medicines will be listed in an easy-to-use side-by-side display. In addition to making it easier to see how much certain medicines will cost, the open competition could result in lower prices overall.

By the way, if certain politicians or special interest groups try to tell you about “drastic Medicaid cuts,” don’t believe them. The budget we just passed INCREASES Medicaid spending by \$200 million. With this budget, our total welfare spending for next year will surpass \$6 billion! That’s as much as we spend on all education – from kindergarten through college! The notion that we’re not spending enough on health care for the poor is simply not true.

The budget now enters the compromise stage, when differences between the Senate and House versions of the budget are debated and worked out. The Constitution requires the final version of the budget to be on the governor’s desk by May 5.

The Senate this week also passed a wide-ranging bill to increase the government’s oversight of dams and reservoirs. SB 1236 is largely a response to the failure of the dam at the Tom Sauk Reservoir earlier this year. The bill increases the number of dams falling under government control from the current 600 to more than 3,000. At my insistence, the bill continues to exempt agricultural dams.

