



*Nothing is politically right
that is morally wrong.*

MISSOURI SENATE
JEFFERSON CITY

*Free and fair discussion
is the firmest friend of truth.*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Senate Advances Priorities to the Governor ***Reform Efforts Include Eminent Domain, Ethics and Healthcare***

JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate advanced significant legislation including eminent domain reform, healthcare reform, fully funding the school funding formula, new laws to protect children from sexual predators, and setting Missouri on a path to energy independence. Senate President Pro Tem Michael R. Gibbons, R-Kirkwood, named those issues as Senate priorities at the start of the Second Regular Session of the 93rd General Assembly. Gibbons said these priorities, as well as legislation strengthening campaign finance and lobbying ethics, joined with the reforms accomplished during the 2005 legislative session will put the people of Missouri on a strong foundation for decades to come.

"More Missourians are at work, businesses are choosing Missouri as a place to grow and invest over other states, even other countries," Gibbons said. "Our children have a better chance at a great education, and we are safer."

Gibbons said a difficult issue the Senate tackled this session is reform to end the abuse of eminent domain in the state. The measure, House Bill 1944, puts property owners first by limiting eminent domain from being used in projects solely for economic development. Secondly, in the rare cases where eminent domain could be used, the bill outlines that property owners should be paid based on what the price of the land would be for development, not its current use.

Gibbons represents Sunset Hills which was devastated by a failed eminent domain project for a new shopping mall.

"This bill creates a threshold that will prevent developers and local governments from abusing the awesome power of government to take someone's home, farm or business," he said.

Legislation that significantly reforms Missouri's current campaign fundraising laws as well as limits travel expenses lawmakers can accept from lobbyists passed the General Assembly. Sen. Charlie Shields, R-St. Joseph, handled the bill and said it was the most important legislation passed this year.

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"We've inherited a system of reporting and ethics laws that needed to be updated," Shields said. "Every person in Missouri has the right to know how much money candidates are raising and where it's coming from."

The measure, House Bill 1900, removes the campaign contribution caps to individual candidates. Sponsors say allowing citizens to contribute directly to a candidate improves transparency.

The Legislature approved a \$20.8 billion state operating budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, with an emphasis on improving education. It included a \$127 million increase for the school foundation formula, as well as an additional \$15 million to fund the Small Schools Grant program. Universities and community colleges received increases of 2 percent, marking the first increases for higher education in several years.

The Senate also advanced legislation cracking down on fraudulent Medicaid providers. Many experts believe as much as \$575 million of taxpayer money is stolen from the Medicaid system each year due to fraud committed by medical providers who participate in the state-funded healthcare program. Unfortunately, the House failed to pass this measure.

Legislation protecting children by increasing penalties for sexual offenders and creating a Child-Safe Internet passed unanimously. It sets 30 year minimums for anyone who commits forcible rape or sodomy against a child less than 12 years old.

"Any sexual predator who might consider harming a child must know, that the punishment will be swift, certain, and severe," Gibbons said. "Or to put it another way, we are going to lock the door and throw away the key."

The Senate also took a first step to putting Missouri on a path to energy independence by advancing legislation that will provide Missouri motorists with a cleaner burning, renewable fuel that lowers prices at the pump and supports Missouri's farmers by requiring gasoline sold in Missouri to contain a 10 percent ethanol blend.

The 2006 regular session ended today at 6 p.m. The legislature will next return for the annual veto session held in September.

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