



Gibbons Capitol Report
May 4, 2006

Giving Missourians the Most for Their Money

This week in the Missouri Senate we gave final approval to the \$20.8 billion state operating budget. We spent months working hard to figure out how to give Missourians the most value for their tax dollars. We invested the small surplus to bring the biggest value to future generations. Our economy is on the move, thanks to many sweeping reforms we were able to pass last year, and we expect our economy to grow stronger as more people are able to find good jobs in Missouri.

Investing Now to Help Our Future

The thirteen budget bills included a \$127 million increase to fund 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 two percent across the board, marking the first increases for higher education in several years. The A+ program for students who attend community colleges received a \$1.8 million increase. We also allocated \$17.6 million more to elementary school food programs, and special education received \$5 million more than last year.

Every person in Missouri should have more available, affordable healthcare and we made sure the funding for the first phase of our healthcare reform was in place. Missourians this year will see more than \$200 million dedicated to cover the growth in Medicaid and \$20 million to continue Medicaid coverage for 3,000 disabled employees who would like to work, but risk losing their current Medicaid benefits. Missouri's healthcare services will benefit from 21st century technology with our \$25 million investment in the new Healthcare Technology Fund, which will pay for electronic medical records, e-prescribing, telemedicine and telemonitoring.

The budget also includes a four percent pay raise for all state employees, and gives additional increases to those Missourians who work to keep us healthy and safe—an additional four percent raise will go to law enforcement and corrections workers and an additional eight percent raise will go to our state's nurses.

A Dedicated and Conscientious Leader in the Budget Process

One Senator in particular deserves recognition for his tireless commitment to passing a budget with bipartisan support. Senator Chuck Gross, R-St. Charles, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, handled the budget bills in the Senate.

I commend Sen. Chuck Gross for his dedication and hard work on the budget process. His ability to bring people from both sides to agree on difficult decisions should not go unnoticed. He has worked with all senators to shape a budget that protects our state's children, especially their education and healthcare, by giving the best services taxpayers can afford without a tax increase.

Speedy Passage and Bipartisan Support

This is only the third time since 1989, when the constitutional deadline for budget bills was set, that the budget was truly agreed to and finally passed two days in advance of the deadline. Senators from both sides of the aisle voted unanimously to pass all the budget bills out of the Senate Appropriations committee. All Republican and Democrat senators signed all the conference committee reports.

Our state's budget did grow this year to catch up with the losses we experienced over the past several years. This growth, although a small surplus, is a key indication of our economic improvement. The state's general revenue has grown—it is nearly double what was hoped for last spring. That means there are more people at work than there were last year at this time. More Missourians are at work and more businesses are choosing our state as a place to grow and invest over other states. Our economy truly is on the move.