



THE STOUFFER REPORT

Senator Bill Stouffer
Senate District 21

Capitol Building, Room 332
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Maintaining Missouri's Pledge to Education

It is always a good idea to have priorities. In Missouri, our Constitution makes funding education a top priority second only to public debt. In 2006, Missouri continued its commitment to K-12 education by fully funding the state's foundation formula and making significant investments in Higher Education.

The budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 contains full funding for elementary and secondary education in Missouri. This includes a \$127 million funding increase and an additional \$15 million for the Small Schools Grant program. Common-sense provisions to change summer school funding and to increase early childhood education opportunities in our state were also passed.

In recognition that higher education is an investment in Missouri's future, this year's budget also includes more than \$17 million in new funding for two- and four-year colleges and universities. By making education a top priority, Missouri can thrive in the 21st century.

Although the budget proved a success, politics unfortunately got in the way of passing at the legislative level a plan to sell assets of the Missouri Higher Education Loan Authority (MOHELA). The plan would have sold \$478 million in MOHELA assets to benefit Missourians.

The measure maintained \$327 million in university capital improvements, along with \$6 million in matching funding for maintenance of community college campuses. An additional \$1 million would be allocated to each of the 12 community college districts in the state that offer professional health-care degrees such as nursing, dental hygiene, occupational therapy and radiology technology. The plan would also create a fund to provide continued scholarships in health-care fields, with \$21.1 million dedicated to the fund.

The MOHELA plan also would have invested millions of dollars to expand access to health care in underserved areas. Under the plan, students who receive medical and dental scholarships would pledge to work in clinics in underserved areas. There are 92 areas, ranging from rural counties to certain inner city areas, designated as underserved by medical professionals. Ninety counties are recognized for a shortage of dental professionals. The bill calls for a one-time investment of \$52.2 million to upgrade and maintain federally qualified health centers currently located in underserved areas.

Controlling government spending and growth should be a priority as well. I am confident Missouri officials will be able to move forward with a common sense plan to reinvest MOHELA assets to benefit our state's changing economy. Education, including our colleges and universities, must continue to remain a top priority.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by email at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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