



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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Approving a Budget to Fund our Needs, Not Burden Taxpayers

JEFFERSON CITY — The Senate this week approved the budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1. Lawmakers have again made education a top priority, and investments in health-care technology will improve patient care and the economy, while saving money for taxpayers in the long run. As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I have worked a lot with this budget, and I believe it makes the most of our resources for the benefit of Missouri residents.

The budget, comprised of 13 House bills appropriating nearly \$21 billion, is highlighted by Missouri's commitment to education. Senators have approved a \$127 million increase for Missouri's K-12 foundation formula and an additional \$15 million to fund the Small Schools Grant program. Missouri's colleges and universities are also set to receive a 2 percent funding increase, the first funding boost for higher education in several years.

We have also pledged our support for improving health care in Missouri by investing in technology. Aside from guaranteeing some Medicaid services that were made subject to appropriations last year, such as funding for eyeglasses and wheelchair accessories for adult Medicaid recipients, the Senate plan also puts \$25 million into the Healthcare Technology Fund. The fund will be used to invest in electronic medical records, electronic prescribing and tele-monitoring. Funding will also be used to launch by Jan. 1 a Web site listing the prices Missouri pharmacies charge for the 50 most commonly prescribed drugs in the state. These health-care improvements will allow better service and prices for Missourians in need of medical assistance.

The landmark economic reform packages from last year, which made significant improvements to Missouri's economy, have allowed the Senate to approve funding increases for other important areas. The Senate approved nearly \$5 million in additional funds for the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Economic Development will receive approximately \$6 million more than it did in the 2006 fiscal year. Meanwhile, the public safety, transportation and social services departments are also seeing funding boosts.

With the economic improvements Missouri has seen over the past year, the Senate was able to fully fund some of the programs for which there were no resources last year. Meanwhile, we are continuing to invest in the future of health care and our economy to maintain a responsible budget picture. With your support, we will continue to provide for our state without placing an undue burden on taxpayers.

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*Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid,
Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.*