



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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The State of the State Address

JEFFERSON CITY – Week two of the 2006 legislative session was highlighted by the governor's State of the State Address, which Gov. Matt Blunt presented to the Missouri General Assembly Wednesday evening. In the address, the governor outlined his top priorities for 2006, including education, energy policy and health care.

Of the major issues state officials will address in 2006, Gov. Blunt made clear that education funding is his number-one priority. In his address, the governor called on lawmakers to fully fund the first year of the new K-12 school foundation formula, passed in 2005. The governor proposed a \$167-million increase in funding for public schools.

The governor's budget plan also calls for a 2-percent increase in state funding for public two- and four-year colleges and universities. That proposal would increase the higher education budget by more than \$17 million.

Creating a comprehensive energy action plan is another top issue in 2006. Lawmakers will work to develop a wide-ranging policy that will focus on rising heating costs, home-heating assistance for low-income Missourians, and agriculture-based fuels, such as ethanol and biodiesel, to produce renewable energies that decrease dependency on foreign resources.

Health care will again be addressed by lawmakers in 2006. The Legislature will revisit Medicaid, Missouri's state-sponsored health care program. In 2005, lawmakers made several reforms to the system to cut waste, save Missouri an estimated \$600 million, and ensure the program remains viable.

The governor called on lawmakers to further reduce Medicaid fraud and waste, and he requested the Legislature take additional steps to make certain that low-income Missourians are insured. The governor also called for more funding for residential care facilities, and in-home health care, and he supported further technological advances in health care.

Funding for law-enforcement facilities and increased penalties for some criminals is another major issue on the legislative agenda. The governor called for the creation of an additional crime lab for processing evidence and an increase in funding for drug courts, which work to prevent drug- and alcohol-related crimes by treating offenders. Stronger penalties for sexual predators and those who abuse seniors is another priority. Several measures increasing penalties for sexual offenders have been in the Senate since pre-filing began Dec. 1.

Reviewing Missouri laws concerning eminent domain, the process of claiming private land for public use, is another top priority for lawmakers. In response to a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court decision allowing governments to claim private land for use by commercial developers, the governor formed the Missouri Task Force on Eminent Domain to examine state eminent-domain law. The task force submitted its final recommendations to the General Assembly on Dec. 30. Measures introduced in the Senate would limit or outright prohibit the use of eminent domain for private development.

In Wednesday evening's address, the governor also proposed a 4 percent pay raise for state employees and funding for a new veterans' cemetery near Ft. Leonard Wood and the veterans' ombudsman program. The governor noted that the budget he is submitting is the first in eight years that requests funding for fewer than 60,000 state employees.

The Missouri Senate will reconvene at 4 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 17. The Second Regular Session of the 93rd Missouri General Assembly will run through Friday, May 12.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-8793 or by e-mail at: delbertscott@senate.mo.gov