



Committees Hear Legislation on College Savings and Political Phone Calls

JEFFERSON CITY — A wide variety of bills were introduced in the opening weeks of session, and now lawmakers are getting down to the business of combing through these measures in committee. This week I testified before two Senate committees on bills I have filed. These measures reflect my commitment to making college more affordable for Missouri families and limiting the intrusion of unsolicited political campaign advertisements into our private lives.

On Jan. 29, I introduced legislation to the Senate Ways and Means Committee that will make it easier for families to save for college. Senate Bill 224 allows married couples in Missouri to deduct from their joint income taxes up to \$16,000 of annual contributions to MOST — Missouri's 529 College Savings Plan. Currently, taxpayers who participate in the college-savings program may deduct up to \$8,000 from their individual tax liability, forcing married couples that file a joint return to open two college accounts for the same child. It also allows a spouse who has no earned income to save money for college in the MOST program and reap the benefits of the tax deduction on their joint return.

The state-sponsored MOST program helps make saving for college easy and affordable. The plan features significant federal and state tax benefits for Missouri taxpayers, as well as low costs and 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week account access. Contributions to MOST accounts grow free of federal and Missouri state income taxes and can be withdrawn tax-free when used for the beneficiary's higher education expenses.

With tuition costs rising, saving for college has never been more important. I encourage Missourians to take a good look at the benefits the MOST program provides. For more information, go online to www.missouri529.org or call toll free (800) 962-5088.

Although saving for college can be tough, relaxing at home or sitting down to dinner should not have to be. Nevertheless, last November's elections brought a nuisance to many Missouri homes — automated phone calls, or "robocalls," that were used for political campaigning. Many Missourians complained that they had received too many unsolicited robocalls, as many as eight in a single evening.

This week, I introduced to the Senate Commerce and Environment Committee legislation that includes automated calls in the state No Call law and requires the calls to identify who has paid for them. SB 65 makes certain exemptions to the ban on automated phone calls to No Call participants, such as calls citizens have given permission to receive and those preceded by a live person who obtains consent to play the automated message.

The legislation also requires political phone calls to include a “paid for by” statement that identifies who funded the message. The First Amendment prohibits outright bans on political phone calls, but we can enact common-sense reforms to annoying and irresponsible automated messages. Along with the above items, SB 65 will also add faxes and cell phones to the No Call list so consumers will not have to receive unsolicited faxes or calls on their cellular phone.

These measures will have a real impact on the lives of Missourians. Whether by offering new options for college investments or allowing for peaceful evenings during campaign season, I hope my work in the Senate can have a positive effect on the citizens of the 2nd Senate District and throughout our state.

If you have comments or questions about this week’s column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by phone at (866) 271-2844.

###