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## **Senator Rupp Applauds Senate's Work on the Budget**

JEFFERSON CITY — Your State Senate has cleared the first hurdle in the one thing we as senators are required to do: pass a budget. We completed work on 13 budget bills covering \$21.4 billion in state spending starting on July 1<sup>st</sup>. While some of our numbers differ slightly from our colleagues in the House, I feel confident we'll find middle ground by the May 11<sup>th</sup> final budget deadline.

One of the things I'm most proud of from this budget is our spending on education. The money we expend to educate our youngest children in the basics to our older students for their professional degrees will have an impact long after any of us leave the Capitol Building. My work on the Senate Education Committee and the Joint House-Senate Education Committee is responsible for large gains in elementary and secondary education as well as higher education.

We have increased the amount to the re-designed Foundation Formula by \$147 million compared to last year's budget, continuing our commitment to fully funding our Foundation Formula.

For the second year in a row, colleges and universities in Missouri will see more money as well. The Higher Education budget has been increased by about \$100 million with community colleges and our public four-year universities seeing their funding going up 4-5 percent. In addition, we've increased the number of state-funded scholarships and the amount of money in those. Students who test in the top 3 percent of their college entrance exams will get a \$3000 a year scholarship (up from \$2000 a year), and those who are in the top 3-5 percent will get a new \$1000 a year scholarship. We've also moved to rein the rising cost of a college education by capping tuition increases by our higher learning centers.

Of course, we've also made increases to other important areas of state government such as healthcare seeing an increase of more than \$150 million to cover the growth of Medicaid and a nearly 4 percent increase to the Department of Health and Senior Services share of state money.

We've set some priorities, and I believe they are the right ones. If these numbers hold up to negotiations with our counterparts in the House, I feel Missouri will be on the right road to taking care of today's needs and ensuring tomorrow's future.

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.

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