



# SENATOR MATT BARTLE

**District 8 – Capitol Building, Room 319 Jefferson City, MO 65101**

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## **Senate Advancing Health-care Plan that Reduces Costs and Improves Service**

This week the Senate breaks for the annual spring recess that marks the halfway point of the 2007 legislative session. As we return next week many important issues remain to be dealt with; one of these is improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Missouri's public health-care services. After decades of unchecked growth, Medicaid had become a cumbersome giant, draining taxpayer dollars without providing adequate results. In recent years, lawmakers have come to the realization that fundamental reform is needed and are taking steps to create a health-care system that improves our citizens' overall health and wellness, instead of one that merely treats people once they are sick.

A look back over the 40 year history of Missouri's Medicaid program shows that over time, the program has experienced exponential growth. In 1968, Missouri spent less than \$39 million on Medicaid, which represented just 4 percent of our total budget. By 2004, total expenditures approached \$5 billion, making up 28 percent of the budget.

This trend continued the following year and in fiscal year 2005, Medicaid expenditures grew by nearly 30 percent. Something needed to be done. After the legislature took action in 2005 and passed a bill to streamline the delivery of Medicaid services, the Medicaid budget grew by less than 2 percent the following year. Yet despite reining in costs, the problem is not solved. The entire Medicaid system needs to be rethought and reformed. This year the General Assembly is debating legislation to implement a new health-care system that will provide better services while reducing the burden on Missouri taxpayers.

This plan is called "MO HealthNet." It focuses on wellness and preventive care over more costly emergency care and emphasizes transparency and choice to produce more informed health-care consumers. This plan provides all those enrolled with a health-care advocate who serves as a patient's home-base for both preventive care and for more pressing medical needs.

MO HealthNet also offers a rewards system to provide incentives for Missourians to improve their health. Recipients can earn points for making appointments, getting screenings and reaching health goals set by them and their health-care advocate. Under the plan, health-improvement points could then be used as credits on debit cards to be used for co-pays, prescription drugs and other health-related expenses.

This plan is innovative and is designed to keep Missourians healthy, rather than treating them once they're already sick. It will also empower participants and will promote a culture of healthy lifestyle choices, leading to better informed health-care consumers and reducing overall costs to taxpayers.

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 e-mail at [matt\\_bartle@senate.mo.gov](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov) or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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