



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the  
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# Mo HealthNet, Local Control

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JEFFERSON CITY – Sometimes in the Missouri Senate, a half a loaf is better than no loaf, and I'd say the Medicaid reform bill that won first-round approval this week represents half a loaf.

Senate Bill 577 would replace the current state Medicaid program with Mo HealthNet, which moves more low-income Missourians into private managed care plans. The legislation also tries to get folks to change their behaviors by offering incentives to quit smoking or lose weight. While these might be admirable goals, I don't think someone's access to health care should be based on their ability to lose a few pounds or kick the habit.

SB 577 does have some good provisions, like providing a health care advocate to help people make better decisions about their health care needs. It creates a toll-free, 24-hour hotline staffed by licensed registered nurses who can help patients make decisions about their health care needs before they make an appointment to see their doctor or go to the emergency room.

SB 577 also creates the Health Care Technology Fund, which will be used to promote technological advances to improve patient care, decrease red tape, and increase patient satisfaction.

However, the legislation does nothing for the tens of thousands of Missourians who lost health care services two years ago. I supported an amendment which would have reversed the cruel cuts pushed by the governor in 2005, but it failed. We've heard the governor and his supporters talk about a budget surplus this year, but they'd rather use that extra money to give tax credits to special interest groups than help folks get back the health care they lost.

The Senate did adopt my amendment to SB 577 which allows centers for independent living that help patients refurbish medically necessary durable medical equipment, like wheelchairs, instead of buying new equipment, to receive 20% of the savings. So, instead of buying a brand new \$6,000 wheelchair, the center could fix the old one and save taxpayers \$4,800, while the center for independent living would receive \$1,200. On the farm, if a tractor breaks down, you grab the duct tape and baling wire and fix it instead of buying a new one. This common-sense approach is often lacking at the Capitol.

The Senate also resumed debate this week on local control legislation. Senate Bill 364 is a fast-moving target that seems to change week by week, but my position still stands – that government closest to the people is best. It's a lot easier for folks to talk to their county commissioners than it is to take a day off in the middle of the work week and drive all the way to Jefferson City. I also take issue with this "one-size-fits-all" mentality that's at the heart of SB 364. What works in Bates or Barton County may not work in Adair or Audrain County. I continue to work with the sponsor of the bill to address the concerns I've heard from the people back home.

We visited with a lot of folks at our capital office this week, including members of the Missouri Farm Bureau and folks who work at independent living centers.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 573-751-7852.