



## MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the  
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# Senate Approves State Budget

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JEFFERSON CITY – The Missouri Senate this week approved thirteen budget bills totaling \$21.4 billion for the fiscal year beginning July 1. The bills include a \$132 million increase for the school foundation formula, as well as an additional \$15 million increase to fund the Small Schools Grant program. Universities and community colleges received increases of between four and five percent, marking the second consecutive year for higher education increases.

Healthcare spending also saw large increases with more than \$150 million dedicated to cover the growth in Medicaid. \$13.4 million will go to the Ticket to Work program that provides Medicaid to disabled employees who would like to work, but risk losing their Medicaid benefits by doing so. \$7.5 million is dedicated to improve Missouri's delivery of healthcare with the use of electronic medical records.

That's the good news. The bad news is we were not able to restore health care for the thousands of Missourians who lost it when the legislature cut Medicaid in 2005. Republicans keep talking about a budget "surplus" of \$200 million or more, but that money only exists because we took away the health care for 100,000 of Missouri's most vulnerable citizens and cut health care services to 300,000 more of our neediest citizens. It's not a surplus, it's a deficit – a deficit of compassion, a deficit of caring, and a deficit of vision.

The House sent us a bill lowering the Social Security tax because we want Missouri to be a friendly state for seniors to move to. The bill would cost the state \$285 million next year. A Senate committee made changes to the bill that will cost us \$130.3 million in the next three years. If people look at us and say they won't take care of those who need help when they had the resources to do it, seniors won't move here.

Medicaid cuts were made when the state did not have the dollars; now we have the dollars and I just think it's wrong not to restore health care to those who need it most.

I also tried to add money for senior centers and home-delivered meals. When I was running for office, I went on a Good Neighbor Sweet Corn Tour and delivered sweet corn to every senior nutrition center in the district. I returned in the fall to deliver turnips to those same senior centers. It was a very personal experience for me and I got to know a lot of good people in the district.

Last year, when I served on the budget committee in the House, we had a request for \$4.3 million for senior nutrition centers; we gave them \$1 million. This year there was no new money in the budget for meals for seniors. All they asked for last year is an extra 50-cents per meal. I offered an amendment to the budget this year to simply fulfill the remainder of that 50-cent per-meal-served request; \$2.6 million is all I asked for to fulfill this request. It was defeated.

You know, goodwill on the local level can only go so far. Senior centers had many fundraisers and people are deeply concerned about this.

The state needs to step up if people are hungry and hurting and have our dollars reflect our values. We need to provide the money to feed those whom we call "The Greatest Generation." Instead, we are looking at bills that will cost us \$578 million in tax credits and exemptions. One of the basic duties of state government is to care for those least among us, but we seem to have misplaced priorities around here.

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