



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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A Weekly Column for the
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Health Care Reform Bill Fails to Restore Coverage to Thousands of Missourians

JEFFERSON CITY – One of the biggest issues facing lawmakers in Missouri this year was transforming the state health care system for those in need of assistance. While the final version of the bill approved on the last day of session has some good points, it does not go nearly far enough in my opinion.

I did sign the Conference Committee Report on Senate Bill 577 to keep the bill moving forward in the process. But at the end of the day, when I see the overall picture of where we were two years ago compared to where we are today, there are still fewer children insured under the CHIPS in Missouri today than there were in 2005. And the frustrating thing about that is at the time when other states have expanded coverage to every child, we're just trying to make up ground.

When we look at the MAWD Program and the restorations in this bill, we're just making up ground once again. It's estimated that 6,000 disabled folks will be served by the partial restoration of the MAWD Program in SB 577, but that's still fewer than 40% of where we were in 2005. I believe we do a disservice to disabled Missourians by not fully restoring the MAWD Program. During my campaign for the state senate this was a huge issue for folks back home.

We've talked about a \$200-million surplus, and this body voted for a tax cut for those families who in retirement could be making a six-figure retirement, and yet we could not fully restore the MAWD Program. We did not fully restore this crucial program despite a \$200-million surplus, but we can afford a \$155-million tax cut.

You could be a senior today living under the poverty level and not have your basic health care needs met. As I've said before, the greatest indicator of the morals and the values that we hold in the legislature and in the governor's office is where we put our resources.

The MO HealthNet bill is pretty good and has some real good policies. But you know you can have a really good-looking Cadillac sitting in your driveway but if you don't have any gas in it, you're not going anywhere. We have 700,000 Missourians today without health insurance. There are still 140,000 people without the health care services they had in 2005.

I will say I am very appreciative of the women's health initiatives in this bill, and I'm appreciative of the dental coverage and of the vision coverage. I don't want to just focus on the negative parts of the bill because there are some good things in the bill. But how do I go home and tell those folks who I campaigned so hard to let me come here - I built you a Cadillac but I didn't put any gas in it for you.

When we talk about spending record amounts on health care for the people of Missouri, if you just come home and listen a little bit, they'll say, "Well guess what - I'm spending record amounts on health care. You're not doing anything different or special over what I'm doing."

Folks are asking legislators, "Why am I spending record amounts on health care? Will the bill fix that?"

I'm not sure, but until we do know, I don't know how we can tell those folks to just get by. Since 2005 we have left one **billion** dollars in Washington, DC...well, actually, we left it in Massachusetts, we left it in Illinois, we left it in other states that decided to expand their insurance programs and their health care models to more people. They got our money - we're a donor state now.

We've had two years to examine the effects of the cuts made in 2005. I would have hoped we would have seen the outcry from the people in the last election, because if you'd look at the race I had you'd know the people wanted their health care restored because they are hurting.

At the end of the day, as I have gone through this process, I have voted to move this bill forward. I have taken a significant amount of grief from the folks who supported me for supporting this bill, and it is a better bill now than when we started working on it. But there are still people hurting, and the morals I was brought up with mean simply to be a good neighbor and to be thankful. We, the state, are the insurance policy for those who have challenges. We the people must watch out for our neighbors.

I did not vote for the final version of the bill because it does not restore health care services to those who lost them two years ago. We still have more children uninsured under this bill than we did before the cuts in 2005; you can still be a senior living in poverty and not have access to health care. We did not fully restore the MAWD Program, which makes no sense because in my opinion, you should be able to work and still get health care benefits. Let every person who has a disability work and be able to get health care.

We had a moral duty to do better on behalf of the citizens of this state, and in some ways, we failed that duty.

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