



THE STOUFFER REPORT

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Capitol Building, Room 332
Jefferson City, MO 65101

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State of the State Address Outlines Budget Ideas & Priorities

This year's State of the State Address gave center stage to Missouri's roaring economy, budget priorities and biofuels. Gov. Blunt's initiatives included expanding access to affordable health care, boosting funding for K-12 and higher education, and fully funding the ethanol and biodiesel incentive funds. These and other issues will be at the forefront of Senate debate this year, and I look forward to enacting positive legislation benefiting Missourians.

In the governor's Jan. 24 address, he introduced a plan to reduce the number of uninsured Missourians while improving efficiency in the state health-care program. Missouri HealthNet, which will replace the cumbersome Medicaid program, will focus on prevention and wellness to improve the health of Missourians. The plan works to keep Missourians healthy, rather than treating them once they're already sick. Further, it will empower participants with transparency and real choices to create informed health-care consumers.

This is not just talk. In creating a system that meets medical needs, sustains providers and honors taxpayers, Gov. Blunt has recommended \$60 million for Federally Qualified Health Centers and \$53 million for in-home care for seniors. He has also proposed cutting the franchise tax for businesses that provide health insurance for employees and creating a system that allows employees to take their health-care policy with them as they change jobs.

Education is of course another top priority for all Missourians. In addition to providing a funding increase of \$214 million for Missouri's K-12 funding formula, the governor is also emphasizing math and science education to keep our state competitive in the global economy. He is proposing \$2.9 million for technology upgrades in 100 classrooms in 100 Missouri schools, \$1 million for math- and science-based after-school programs, and \$250,000 to improve advanced-placement courses focusing on math and science.

Higher education will also receive much attention. The governor called on lawmakers to make tuition rates more predictable for working families. He has also called for a \$40 million increase for higher education and \$72.5 million for need-based scholarships. Additionally, he included in his budget \$3.4 million to recruit more health-care professionals for Missouri, and his Lewis and Clark Discovery Initiative will provide an additional \$335 million for campus-construction projects benefiting Missouri students.

Renewable fuels are also important for our state, especially those of us in rural Missouri. Ethanol and biodiesel reduce our dependence on foreign oil, are less harmful to the environment, and add value to Missouri agriculture. Gov. Blunt has called for full funding of the ethanol and biodiesel incentive funds. In addition, I have introduced legislation requiring all diesel fuel sold in Missouri to contain at least 5 percent biodiesel by Jan. 1, 2009. Biofuels offer numerous benefits to Missourians, and they should continue to be promoted.

These and other issues will occupy lawmakers this year, and I will work hard to see that the interests of rural Missourians are represented.

If you have questions or comments about this or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by e-mail at bstouffer@senate.mo.gov.

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