



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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Your Money, Your Choices

JEFFERSON CITY — Many of you sit down every month, maybe every week, and budget your money. It can be a tight squeeze sometimes, and hard choices have to be made as to what your spending priorities will be. Maybe it's deciding if you can afford an extra dinner out or maybe it's choosing what clothes you can afford for yourself or your family. It's not always easy, but you have to do it. In the state legislature, we have a similar dilemma, but we're doing it with **YOUR** money.

This past week, my fellow Senators and I have been wrestling with how this year's state budget will look. We have a bit of an advantage this year as revenue projections look good, and we seem to have more money than in past years to do all the things we want to do. But it's not a bottomless pit, so we've had to set some priorities. Just like you, we've decided our children should be our top priority.

First, we easily passed a nearly 4 percent increase, about \$200 million, in state funding for public elementary and secondary schools. That includes a \$132 million increase to schools under the re-designed Foundation Formula and \$15 million set aside specifically for small schools.

On the higher education side, we've come up with a whopping 10 percent increase - about \$100 million extra - for state-funded colleges and universities in Missouri compared to last year's budget. Community colleges and four-year universities will get a 4-5 percent direct increase in their state money. Meanwhile, we've also ensured students will have more scholarship opportunities to make sure higher education stays affordable.

Another issue that came up this week was the issue of loss limits on the gambling boats that operate in this state. Currently, we've limited the losses to \$500 every two hours. The idea is that there would be a "cooling off" period between the next time a gambler might be able to take part in a game of chance again... and maybe re-think how much that gambler wants to really lose. I sided with a slight minority of senators who argued that lifting the loss limits would violate the pact made with Missouri voters 15 years ago when they decided to allow reigned in gambling. Despite a valiant attempt by one of my colleagues to filibuster lifting the loss limits, our side lost that vote by a slim one-vote margin. I stand by my bi-partisan vote to keep the limits. While losing on this part of the issue, it's not law yet. But I also realize we need to move on and take care of the next piece of business at hand.

It's been quite a week with doing the one thing the state legislature is constitutionally mandated to do, putting together the state budget, and amending something the voters entrusted us to protect, their will. I believe I've made the right choices in both cases.

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Senator Robert Mayer represents the people of Wayne, Ripley, Butler, Stoddard, New Madrid, Pemiscot and Dunklin counties in the Missouri Senate.