



MISSOURI SENATE

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**A Column for the Week
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Spending Your Money

JEFFERSON CITY — This week, the state legislature has finished the one project lawmakers are constitutionally required to do: put together a state budget. Hours of meetings and days of debate have passed, and we worked and re-worked the numbers. There were tough decisions to make... some people got much of what they wanted... no one got EVERYTHING they wanted... but in the end, I think it's a budget we can all live with. Now we have sent that nearly \$21.5 billion plan to spend *your* money to Governor Blunt.

The Fiscal Year 2008 state budget includes more money for several issues I know are near and dear to your hearts including education, social services, and healthcare.

Working with our colleagues in the State House, we were able to once again fully fund the re-vamped Foundation Formula for public elementary and secondary schools. They will see a \$132 million increase in their money and small schools will enjoy a \$15 million increase in the money appropriated to them compared to last year's budget. Colleges and universities in the state are also seeing a significant 6.5 percent increase in the funds they receive from the state. I'm proud my work as the Vice Chair on the Senate Education Committee and as a member of the Joint Education Committee could produce a plan so in tune to what our schools need.

We've also made sure to take care of those who cannot take care of themselves with good-sized increases to the state's healthcare and social services programs. The Department of Mental Health saw its general revenue money grow by 6.6 percent, the State Health Department will get nearly \$7 million more than it did last year, and we have given the Department of Social Services a healthy 11.1 percent increase in state money. In particular, we put in \$16 million

more to the fund to reimburse providers for Medicaid services. Our nursing homes will get another \$9 a day for each patient. The state's foster care system is getting \$2.5 million more in the coming budget, with an increase in the reimbursement to foster care parents of about \$30-40 a month.

The 13 budget bills for the new fiscal year beginning July 1st now sit on the governor's desk. We've done our duty... and our best... to spend your money the best way possible.

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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.