

For Immediate Release

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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

The 94th General Assembly is now sworn in and ready for another legislative session. The session will see the Senate with five new members joining the other 29 standing or re-elected Senators for another legislative session.

This is my 11th year to serve in the General Assembly and I am often asked how this session is any different from other opening weeks. One of the biggest changes this year over the past few years is that we are entering this session in better budget condition.

If you remember, for the past few years we have entered the budget cycle with almost a billion dollars in combined budget shortfalls. This year we enter the budget cycle with a surplus in our revenue estimates. This surplus is due to many of the budget reductions that were enacted along with our ability to wean ourselves away from the policy of using one-time revenues for the funding of programs that required on-going revenues to sustain them.

Credit must also go to the people of Missouri for their work ethic. Revenues were up because more people were working and being successful. More jobs were created through small business expansion.

This week the annual State of the Judiciary address was given to the General Assembly by this year's Chief Justice, the Honorable Michael Wolff. He gave the General Assembly an update on the status of our court and justice system in the state of Missouri, their goals for this year, and the budget needs to accomplish their mission.

Committee assignments have once again been announced and I am honored to once again serve on the Senate Appropriations Committee. This committee is made up of ten Senate members who work long hours in committee crafting the budget for the State of Missouri. The Appropriations Committee began meeting this week by listening to public testimony. This is an excellent time for the public to offer public testimony on how government should work and be more responsive to budget needs across the state.

The State Senate this past Monday voted to form a new committee to deal with the growing number of health and mental health issues in Missouri. The new committee, to be made

up of five members of the Senate, will act upon legislation that affects the health care of our citizens across the state. I am honored to be asked to chair this committee.

I anticipate that the Health and Mental Health Committee will do much of the work that must be done to form the new health program called Health.net that will replace our current Medicaid program. It is my hope that the state's approach to medical care would center the system on individual decision-making and information, changing the institutional and provider systems and having a greater reliance on scientific changes.

I will use diabetes as one example of the reasons for changing the system. Diabetes is the largest single cost-driver of the cost of health care in the Medicare system. This disease takes one quarter of the Medicare dollar. Diabetes leads to the amputation of limbs, it is the leading cause of adult blindness, it leads to loss of kidney function and to heart disease.

But in today's world, we have an epidemic of diabetes and obesity among children. Much of this is due to the absence of exercise and the wrong diet. If allowed to continue, this trend will put our ability to maintain the health care system in danger. This is because of the long term effect this will have on the future health care budgets of the state. We must begin a health program more focused on preventative health care for the long term health of our state rather than our old system that only pays the bills.

I ask for your support and your prayers as we begin this new session and implement these changes. I welcome your opinions and suggestions. You may reach me at 573-751-1882, e-mail to chuck.purgason@senate.mo.gov, or write to me at the Missouri Senate, State Capitol, Room 420, Jefferson City, MO 65101. If you would like to receive these newsletters electronically, please call or e-mail my office.

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