

For Immediate Release

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SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

Most of the action this week in your state capitol centered on the Governor's annual State of the State address. This is when, traditionally, the Governor lays out his agenda and puts forth his budget for the coming fiscal year.

In a joint session of the House and Senate on Wednesday evening, Governor Blunt proposed overhauling Medicaid, the state's embattled health care system for the poor. About 825,000 Missourians would receive improved health care through HealthNet.

The Governor also proposed offering tax breaks and incentives to businesses to expand health care coverage to uninsured workers. "Other plans work to deliver improved access to affordable health care for every Missourian and the guarantee that the sick and the poor will be well served," Blunt said. "The old Medicaid was about sickness. The new HealthNet will be about prevention and wellness."

The revamped Medicaid program would match enrollees with a primary health care provider and emphasize illness prevention by granting bonus health benefits to those who try to lead healthy lives. Doctors would get more money from the state to try to reverse a shortage of physicians participating in the current Medicaid program.

The Governor is recommending \$2.6 million to implement suggestions from the Mental Health Task Force, a group formed in June to study abuse and neglect in the state mental health system. The issue of the safety of long-term care facilities came to light last year after a deadly blaze at the Anderson Guest House, which served some mentally disabled patients.

The Governor's proposed budget also directs an extra \$40 million to colleges and

universities, including \$4.4 million for Missouri State University and an additional \$500,000 for operating expenses at MSU-West Plains.

Governor Blunt proposed more money for need-based scholarships for college-bound students, math and science programs in public school classrooms and recruitment of students into health care professions.

The Governor embraced about \$133 million in proposed tax breaks, including a plan to eliminate state income taxes on all Social Security benefits.

Also supported by Governor Blunt is \$200,000 for the Alternatives to Abortion program, which provides counseling for pregnant women.

The Senate Appropriations Committee will now begin the process in the Senate of breaking down the state's budget into fine detail. This is a long process that must be completed by the first Friday in May to meet our constitutional requirements.

In other areas, the northern part of the 33rd District is slowly getting back to normal. I have tried to work very hard with the local governments and the State and Federal Emergency agencies to make sure the support groups in these areas were getting the help they need to recover from the ice storms that swept through much of the area. Most power has been restored and the cleanup will be a long and ongoing process. I am proud of the way the people of the district have responded to aid their neighbors in this time of distress and hopefully with everyone working together these areas will return to normal very soon.

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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