

For Immediate Release

SHARING A VIEW OF THE STATE

Issues and Comments – 33rd Senatorial District

Senator

Chuck Purgason

This past week the Missouri Senate finished the Senate's version of the 2008 budget. This is an especially relieving time for me after working on our state budget since the session began in January.

Although this year's budget has its supporters, detractors and opponents, it is much less controversial than some of the budgets of the past. This budget is weaned from the ill managed policy of running an ongoing government with the use of one-time funding. This caused major structural problems in the past and hopefully we will never return to those bad management policies.

Approving funding to run critical functions of state government with an emphasis on improving education, the Missouri Senate advanced thirteen budget bills totaling \$21.4 billion for the fiscal year beginning July 1. The bills include a \$132 million increase for the school foundation formula, as well as an additional \$15 million increase to fund the Small Schools Grant Program. Universities and community colleges received increases of 4 to 5 percent, marking the second consecutive year for higher education increases. This year's budget has a strong emphasis on education. It has funding that includes an additional \$147 million dollars to meet the phase-in schedule, plus we were able to invest in helping more Missouri students attend colleges and universities by greatly expanding scholarships and higher education funding.

Healthcare spending will also see large increases with more than \$150 million dedicated to cover the growth in Medicaid. \$13.4 million will go to the Ticket to Work Program that

provides Medicaid to disabled employees who would like to work, but risk losing their Medicaid benefits by doing so. \$7.5 million is dedicated to improve Missouri's delivery of healthcare with the use of electronic medical records. The budget also increases spending for several health programs including \$3.9 million for autism, \$960,000 for the Missouri Alternatives to Abortion Program, and \$219,000 for four additional senior nutrition centers across the state.

Women and children also benefit from the budget with \$500,000 dedicated to cover the costs of forensic rape exams where rape victims are many times required to foot the bill; an additional \$500,000 for the Show-Me Healthy Women Program as well as an increase totaling \$3.8 million in payments to foster care parents.

Senators and House members will now meet and work out any differences in the bills. Once negotiated and approved by the conference committee, the measures will go back to the House for a vote where they originated. Once adopted by the House, the bills will need Senate approval before moving to the governor.

The budget must pass by 6 p.m., Friday, May 11, as required by the constitution.

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.